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The Grandma Reporter Issue Two: Intimacy

Salty Xi Jie Ng

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The Grandma Reporter

issue two: intimacy

WHAT IS THE
RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN
INTIMACY,
AGING,
AND BEING
A WOMAN?

A collaborative publication by Betty, Crystal, Ellen, Erika, Jacqui, Maureen,
Mildred, Pamela, Roshani, Salty Xi Jie, Sharon, Susan, Tammy & Valerie
Made at the Hollywood Senior Center, Portland, Oregon

From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Welcome to The Grandma Reporter Issue Two: Intimacy. I invite you to pause and consider your own relationship to intimacy. What does intimacy mean to you? Where do you find it? Where do you miss it?

As a collaborative publication on senior¹ women culture, we excavate hidden worlds and discuss topics relevant to senior women that might be overlooked in a youth-focused world. This issue is the result of months of work by a team of women aged 22 to 84 with a shared curiosity about intimacy in our lives. Starting off as strangers and acquaintances gathered in classrooms at the Hollywood Senior Center, our intergenerational conversations flowed with insight and vulnerability, disagreement and appreciation, wonder and poignance. As the 31-year-old instigator of this project, I curated a series of conversations and explorations with seniors, as well as projects led by younger women artists. The support and expansiveness that these women gave each other by talking about what matters to us is profound. All this would not have come to fruition if not for the older women who were brave and interested enough to open up their complex, rich inner worlds.

I deeply believe in women having more conversations about intimacy. It is a human need, entangled with notions of desire and loneliness, as well as

considerations of mental, social, and physical health. And yet it is a taboo subject, especially from an aging perspective. To examine it is deeply important, even political. To care about intimacy is to care about compassion, connection, and wellbeing in an increasingly violent world. There were times I fancied us a small revolutionary group working out of a corner of the world. We were detectives, philosophers, and dreamers examining our own needs and desires.

We explored intimacy from many different angles, attempting to explain to women who did not connect to our work that intimacy is much more than sex. In these pages you will find: short essays by seniors expressing pride and hopeful romanticism; playful instructions for intimacy in everyday life; movement practices for aging bodies; an optimistic medical perspective on women’s sexual health and aging; intimate self-identity exploration through fashion and fantasy; the inaugural Senior Women’s Erotica Club; a slow sex playlist; and a tender yet stirring manifesto on intimacy for older women.

I want to acknowledge that there is always a cultural specificity in discussing social issues. This publication mainly reflects cisgender² and hetero³ experiences of women who primarily grew up in the United States. There are more diverse

perspectives beyond those here, and I hope they find spaces to be shared.

When we met for the first time, I asked everyone what intimacy meant to them. Someone in her seventies said, “We manage without it.” Why is intimacy so hard to talk about or find? Is intimacy essential to overall well-being, to a life of meaning? This publication is many things. It is documentation of an artistic process, a presentation of research, an educational document, a learning tool, a glimpse into private worlds, a dose of fantasy, and a piece of activism. I hope you find that its pages speak intimately to you.

Yours Sincerely,

Salty Xi Jie Ng
Editor, The Grandma Reporter
June 2019, Portland OR, USA

¹Women in our group were comfortable with the term ‘senior.’ In this publication, other terms like ‘elder’ or ‘older’ will be used as well.

²Cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth

³ A heterosexual person is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex

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Supported by the Regional Arts & Culture Council, Oregon

We need...



... 4 hugs a day for survival



... 8 for maintenance



... and 12 for growth.



My goal is to grow everyday.

—Jacqui Jackson

“I have had a very challenging and interesting life but something is missing. I miss human touch. Not just sex but simple things like a touch on a hand or an arm, and hugs. I come from French culture and everyone hugs as a greeting. I find even my friends don’t hug when we greet each other. A friendly hug is not sexual harassment if it is not forced and nothing is expected. I remember dropping my son off at a school dance when he was 15 years old. He surprised me by giving me a hug before he got out of the car in front of his teenage friends. I hugged my sons multiple times a day while they were growing up and saw no reason to stop after they were grown.”

Made by Jacqui Jackson and Salty Xi Jie Ng. Hugging friend: Teri Knesal.

You Are Important

By Sharon Cooper

As a senior widow, the word 'intimacy' has many new meanings. I am not a woman who would actively seek a relationship. If that would happen and eyes would connect for both parties and there was a mutual smile, *then...*

For now, I would love to have intimacy in the form of joining a man for lunch or dinner, a stage show, a ball game – something we would both enjoy seeing. Companionship and conversation would be utmost. I'm not sure I would ever be interested in a permanent relationship again at 84. But I love men; I was raised a tomboy and enjoy their conversation. At a party I am more likely to gravitate to a group of men than to the ladies.

I miss the hand holding, the glances, knowing I'm loved and appreciated, that someone I care for is here by my side. The expression or need for intimacy can vary from person to person. In a partnership, it is created through both giving and taking affection – this changes in intensity with age. When young, our needs are more explosive and immediate in their expectation of satisfaction. As we age,

erection, ejaculation, and also a woman's responses are often slower. Sometimes, we are unable to respond at all. There is often frustration for either or both partners.

So, other means of gratification through intimacy are needed to keep a relationship thriving. The touch of an arm, stroking hair, the caress of a cheek or chest, holding hands, going for walks together, choosing a program or movie that you both enjoy, smiling often, enjoying a joke. Be inventive. Sometimes enjoying things together is all that is left of physical love. The affection and need for closeness are as important as the sexual act.

If you are alone, stay busy. Do not vegetate. Find outlets of pleasure – walk through nature, kick the leaves, go to events that please your senses, volunteer, join a senior center. You are limited only by your imagination. Think about it. There is intimacy in all the above activities even if, on the surface, they appear to not bring pleasure. Tell yourself, you are important.

Instructions for Intimacy in Everyday Life

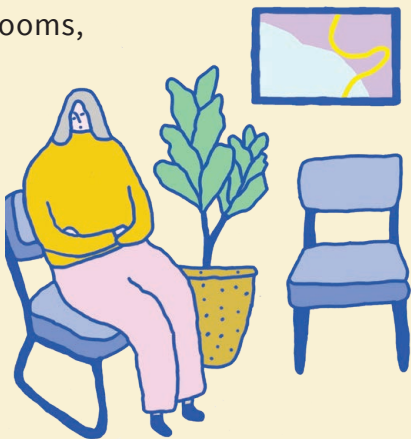
Erika Dedini collaborates with Jacqui Jackson and Maureen Phillips to explore the prompt:
How can senior women manifest or discover more intimacy in their lives?

*“We shared a supportive space to identify needs and acknowledge where intimacy is already present, perhaps in an unexpected form. An inventive, playful spirit then emerged to create the following ideas. We drew upon a variety of instructional formats, including *Fluxus scores, recipes, affirmations, and meditations. I hope older women will enjoy our ideas, but most of all I hope they feel inspired to see potential for creative possibilities within their everyday lives.”*
—Erika

**Fluxus was an artistic movement in the 1960s and 1970s that valued artistic process over product, and manifested as experimental art performances and objects. A score is another word for an instruction.*

TWO OPTIONS FOR INTIMACY IN A WAITING ROOM

(Created in group collaboration)
Some seniors spend a lot of time in waiting rooms, which usually have paintings and plants in them.



1. Find a plant that speaks to you (because they do) and imagine exchanging the life and breath of the plant with yours.



2. You can find intimacy by noticing a painting and imagining yourself in it. Imagine touch, warmth, sounds, and smells as you explore the landscape of the painting.

RECIPE FOR A WALK

Plan ahead. Check the weather.
Warm clothes, good shoes.
Take a walk and notice these ingredients:

- 3 growing things
- 2 pieces of trash
- 1 bare spot
- A broken sidewalk
- 5 red things
- 4 types of moss



Savor each step. Notice the growth stages of nature. Pay attention to each ingredient. Make this a habit by doing it 21 times.

“I walk down Hancock from NE 33rd to the Hollywood Senior Center all the time. I’ve found peace and connection to nature because more people have big front yards full of plants than any other street I’ve walked on.”
—Jacqui

AFFIRMATION FOR INTIMACY

Today I will broaden my mind and notice intimacy everywhere.

“This project has opened my mind to find intimacy all around me. Before I thought of intimacy as only touch and sex!”

—Jacqui



ELDERBERRY ON THE BUS



The next time you take the bus, bring an elderberry plant with you. When people ask what it is, you can tell them that it’s an elderberry (*sambucus nigra* in Latin.) It’s sour and bitter, so you wouldn’t pick an elderberry and eat it (although birds love it!) But you can make wine or cough medicine by adding some honey and just enough potable alcohol to preserve it.

“When you bring a plant on the bus, people sit next to you and talk where they wouldn’t usually. They’re interested in anything live and growing, and you get to tell them what you’re doing it for. I want to give young people an idea of how to make old age better, and to remind them that we have wisdom to share.”

—Maureen

Illustrations by Erika Dedini

Sexual Wellbeing Makes For Healthy Aging

By Jessica Daniel

Physician Assistant Student,
Oregon Health & Science
University

In March 2019 the Hollywood Senior Center invited Jessica Daniel to give a talk on women's sexual health and aging. Jessica is deeply passionate about the subject, which combines her clinical interests in women's health, sexual health, and geriatrics. She regularly gives talks at local senior centers as part of outreach and education for her work. The Grandma Reporter invited her to write an article encapsulating the information given at these talks, so that more women can experience her optimistic perspective.

Our society regularly disregards the sexual lives of older people, especially women. Did you know the medical field has long-identified sexual health as a known contributor to wellbeing and healthy aging? Unfortunately, there is little in the way of education on sexuality or outreach to older adults due to cultural taboos and ageism. Today, sexual dysfunction and sexually transmitted infections amongst older adult women continue to rise. Through women's stories I heard in clinic, the research I uncovered, and the relative lack of sexual health discussions and education, the way I practice patient care is forever transformed.

A 2007 study published by *The New England Journal of Medicine* studied the sexual behavior of older adults for the first time. From this inquiry we know that older adults are not only having and enjoying sex, but that 50% of study respondents reported having at least one bothersome sexual problem and 30% have at least two sexual problems. **What is both shocking and sad is that 75% of women with sexual problems go untreated. Moreover, only 22% of women said they had talked about sex with their doctor since turning 50.** These numbers not only show the relative failure of the medical community to reach out and support aging women, but also that there are large proportions of adult women who are experiencing and suffering from *treatable* problems which affect overall wellbeing and longevity.

Some takeaways from the study:

Age is NOT a cause of sexual dysfunction.

Know your anatomy (see diagram). By knowing how to articulate the location of any symptoms or problems you are experiencing, you can better advocate for yourself and help medical providers better treat you.

Sex does not only equate to intercourse.

Instead, sex can be thought of as any activity with another person that involves sexual contact, whether or not intercourse or orgasm occurs. This is important to note as we age, and sexual practices change. The act of being sexual is what gives you health benefits.

Menopause is not the culprit of all sexual problems as it is often made out to be.

Menopause is an important transition in women's bodies that changes the vaginal environment and anatomy. Though these changes can lead to sexual problems and sexually transmitted infections (STI) without proper care, sexual satisfaction and function can still be improved.

These common symptoms and changes associated with menopause are often treatable either alone, or with the help of a medical professional: vaginal dryness; irritation/burning/itching of the vulva and vagina; painful intercourse; painful urination; increased urinary frequency; urinary incontinence; decreased vaginal acidity (leading to overgrowth of normal bacteria, causing increased urinary tract infections and bacterial overgrowth); weakened pelvic floor muscles (leading to uterine/bladder protrusion).

There is good news! Much can be done to manage or even overcome these changes.

Continued sexual activity maintains vaginal elasticity, increases blood flow (which allows for better lubrication and increased sensation), strengthens pelvic floor muscles, and increases pelvic joint health. **If you are without a sexual partner, the same benefits can be achieved through masturbation and/or use of a vibrator.**

“Sexual health is not simply an added bonus of living, but is an essential pillar of health and wellbeing, up there with a healthy diet, exercise, and mental health”

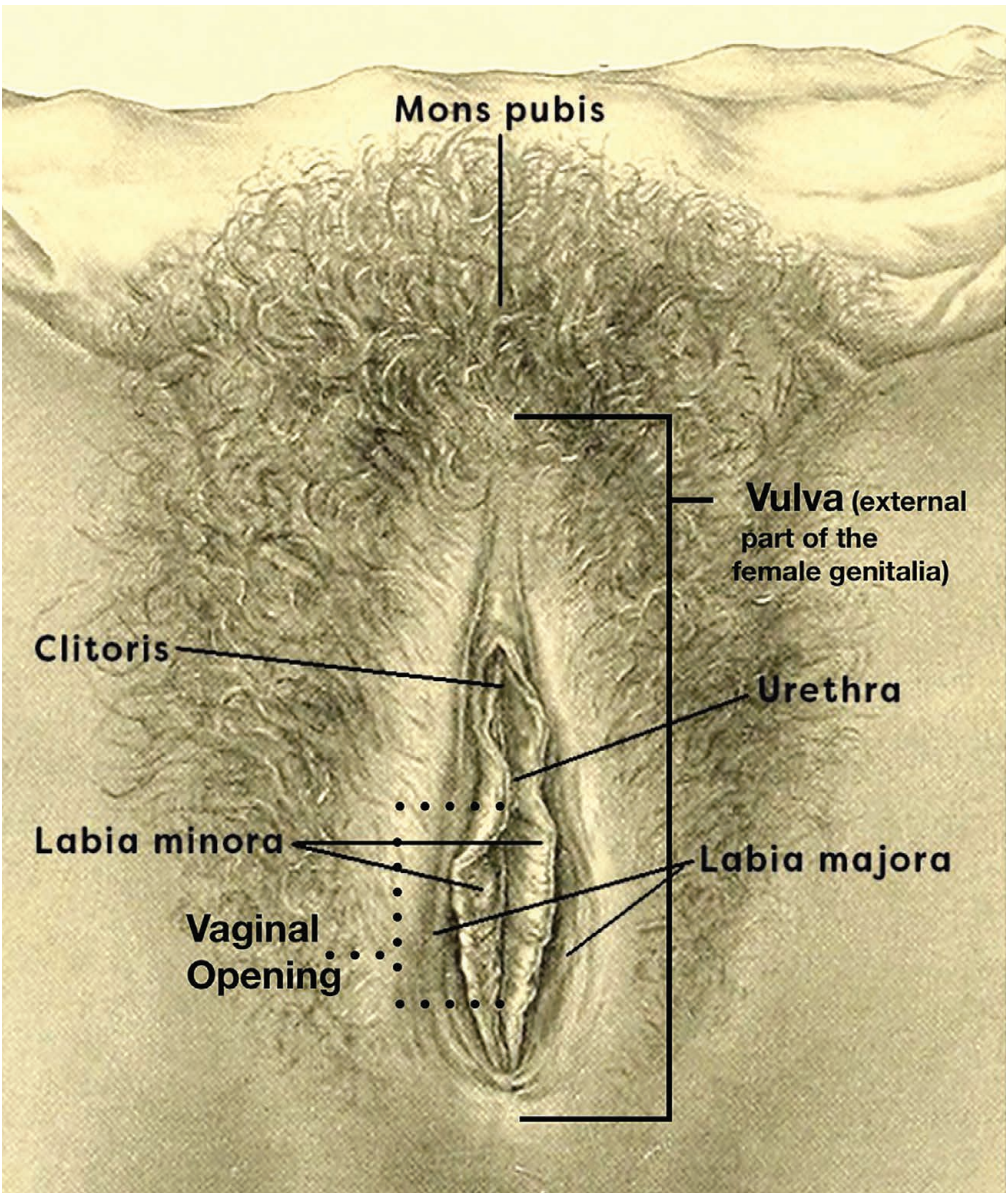


Diagram adapted from Bristow, A. T. (1900). “Surgical Anatomy: A Treatise on Human Anatomy in its Application to the Practice of Medicine and Surgery.” *Annals of Surgery*, 31(1), 137–142.

Female sexual desire is responsive, not spontaneous. This means that for women - contrary to common belief - desire is not the cause of lovemaking, but rather its result. **Sexuality is thus a conscious effort, much like choosing to exercise and eat healthy.**

All moisturizers/lubricants are not created equal. When buying personal moisturizers/lubricants, look for products that will maintain an acidic pH (3.8–4.5) and that have minimal additives. Avoid glycols, microbicides, preservatives, added dyes, flavors, or warming agents. In my opinion, some brands that meet these requirements include: Good Clean Love, Sliquid, Sylk, and YES VM.

- *Moisturizers* = maintenance. They relieve dryness on a day-to-day basis.
- *Lubricants* = love making. They relieve dryness during sexual activity.

Talk with your health care provider about additional treatment options, including: topical vaginal estrogen, hormone therapy, and other medications. The decision to use hormonal therapies requires highly-individualized discussion regarding risks versus benefits.

Talk with your health care provider about getting tested for STIs if: you have had unprotected sex, have a new sexual partner, have more than one partner, or are worried you have been exposed to an

STI. Use male or female condoms to protect yourself from STIs. Medicare often covers the cost of screening for STIs.

If you are experiencing any sex-related issues, seek help!

This subject is vast and deep, and the information provided here is just a start. Nevertheless, my hope is that every woman reading this article takes away the fact that **sexual health is not simply an added bonus of living, but is an essential pillar of health and wellbeing, up there with a healthy diet, exercise, and mental health.** Every woman is unique and has their own individual experience, which further speaks to the importance of partnering with a medical provider whom you trust, and working to maximize your sexual and overall health.

Helpful Resources

- Women of a Certain Age (healthywomenover50.org)
- Woman Lab (womanlab.org)
- North American Menopause Society: Find A Certified Menopause Practitioner (menopause.org/for-women/find-a-menopause-practitioner)
- SaferSex4Seniors (safersex4seniors.org)
- National Institute on Aging (nia.nih.gov)

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Name Two Women You're Going To Give Your Keys To So That When You Die They Can Go And Get Rid Of Your Vibrators

Salty Xi Jie Ng interviews
the activist Jacki Gethner

I first got to know of Jacki Gethner when Amber Kern Johnson, director of the Hollywood Senior Center, passed me Jacki's book *Behind Door #3*. It is a choose-your-own-adventure style workbook that immerses readers in situations relating to older women, facilitating choice-making, self-reflection, and greater understanding. I was blown away by its innovative, accessible format. Finally, I met her at the all-women Valentine's Day dinner she organised at the senior center, where she gave out condoms and tried to foster friendships among women. Jacki is unapologetically herself - visionary, hardworking, compassionate, and very direct. She was nationally awarded the Kaiser Diversity Award in 2009 for her work in the HIV field. She started Women Of A Certain Age (WOACA), a non-profit striving to 'build a community where older women have the knowledge, skill, and self-confidence to develop and sustain healthy relationships.' WOACA organized many events over the last decade, including *Girlfriend Time*, a potluck dinner for women to get together and form bonds. She has also put out *The Girlfriend Guide*, a handbook for aging knowledgeably using tools to address issues that surface with growing older. I sit down with her for a chat.

SALTY: How do you see the position of older women in society today? How does society view them?

JACKI: When I was a kid we used to play tag. There was a safe space where you couldn't get tagged, and we called it glue. I think that older women can play glue for younger women. It's important to have someone that you can go to and sound things out with. Especially for single mums, I think it's imperative. If there's any possibility to have an older friend, that's just a real bonus. Beyond helping to watch kids, they can share what worked for them in a similar situation, which might not work now, but it gives a framework of possibility. When people get older, a lot of younger people think, "Well, their lives are about over." I don't think they realize what a vessel of information older people are. Instead, people calling you 'honey' and stuff like that - it's unnecessary and infantilizing. Also, a lot of women are economically deprived as they get older. They want to work, and they'd be great workers, but they're not given the chance because of a myriad of reasons.

S: How do you see the relationship between older women and intimacy today?

J: I meet so many women who say, "I don't ever want to have sex again in my life." And I go, "That's such a shame." I've always been a real sexual person. It's still not happening for me right now, so where do you go in the meantime? I'm really bored with doing it



Jacki at the first *Girlfriend Time* in 2018. Image by Erica J Mitchell.

myself at this point. I've had relationships with women in the past. Many years ago, and if the situation was right I probably would do that but it would not be one I would initiate, just because that's not where my energy space is. I see a lot of older women entering these relationships just because they're available. What concerns me is that they think it's okay because it's their friend, who's another woman. They don't ever go, "What's your STI history? Maybe we should use some protection." Even though it's with a vibrator, your hand or something else, you still need to use protection unless you've cleaned it thoroughly. When people enter a relationship where they wouldn't maybe consider themselves bisexual, it starts as a sense of touch, and it turns into further intimacy. Not only do they not discuss it before, but they never discuss it afterwards. There seems to be a sense of shame behind that choice that needn't be there. Now that my partner has died, I am totally into younger men. I don't want to be caregiving anybody anymore, I don't want to be dealing with Viagra. I want some mature man who's probably going to be around my son's age, maybe a little bit older, who really feels good about himself and what he wants to offer in a relationship. I don't choose to spend time with women who sit there and talk about their bowel movements, hemorrhoids, problems with their medications, or gossip about their friends.

S: Can you talk about WOACA's aim to build community amongst older women?

J: I've tried a lot of things to create this community. I've found that women will say they want to build a community but they're very linear in what they're willing to change in order to accomplish that. They don't want to try new events, or they have a TV show they can't miss. I tell them, "This is the time for you to expand your horizons, not lessen them." Not that I won't watch a TV show, but I'll invite somebody over if I'm gonna do that. Some of them don't want to stay out late. You can't fix that for people. *Girlfriend Time* has been somewhat successful and somewhat not. The event I had at the Hollywood Senior Center last month was successful, but at our follow-up sessions where women could hang out together, nobody came. I see Facebook postings of women who are in crisis and cannot reach out for the kind of support they need, and it's really sad because I can't make any suggestions to them. I have relationships with people in their 20s, their 30s, their 40s, their 50s, so that I don't 'put all my eggs in one basket' in terms of friendships.

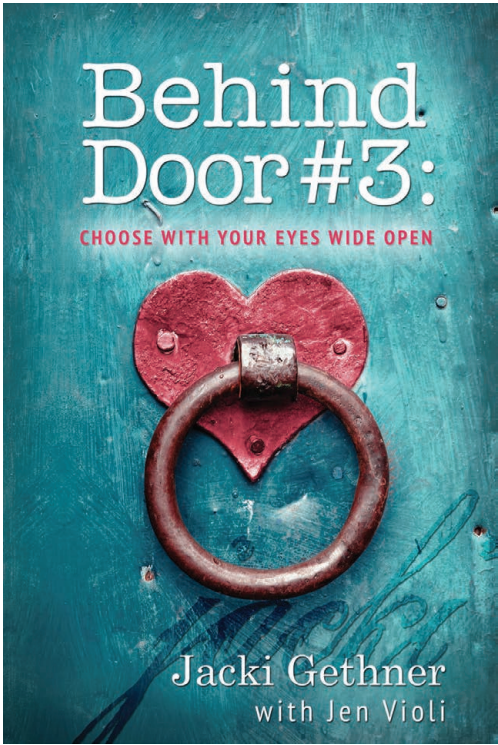
S: What are some other ways older women can support each other today?

J: When you've done a lot of things for yourself your whole life, it's really hard to ask people for help. Like going to the doctor after you find out that you might have something serious going on. That's when you ask a friend to go with you. In *The Girlfriend Guide* there's a template for your friend to use for notetaking during your doctor visits - whatever the doctor says that you're not hearing, because you're dealing with your feelings. I think it's important for women to have someone they can ultimately trust, and I think women are better equipped to trust other women

for certain things. One thing in *The Girlfriend Guide* is, “Name two women you're going to give your keys to so that when you die they can go and get rid of your vibrators, and your porn, or anything that you might have, that your family's not going to want to know about.” Another issue involves ‘keeping up with the Joneses.’ This happens when you no longer have that disposable income to go out as much. Communal buying and eating is a great way to share expenses. Even if it's just three women – buying communally and sharing a meal once a week, followed by cards, a walk, or a movie, for example.

S: What is the future of WOACA?

J: WOACA will be closing this fall. Two national and two local awards have not been enough to encourage funding either locally or statewide. My next step is to offer Behind Door #3 to various agencies. This would allow different versions for different issues such as recovery, incarceration, and sexual abuse. The scenarios will be written by women based on their own narratives about relationship choices. The books can then be used in treatment as well as be sold by the agency to fundraise. The book’s format develops understanding in terms of choices based on our experiences, or lack of experience, like being a widow who meets an attractive man and doesn’t know what to do. Or if we're feeling a little more chunky, weight-wise, and



The following excerpts from Behind Door #3 depict Sharon’s situation. A widow who still misses her husband, she grapples with how to engage with Monty, an attractive man she meets on a cruise.

Cruisin’: Sharon’s Story

- 1. If Sharon felt scared that she was betraying Arthur's memory, turn to page 21.
- 2. If Sharon felt comfortable accepting Monty's invitation to play cards, go to page 25.
- 3. If neither of these fit for you, share why here:

Cruisin’: Sharon’s Story

Option 2B2:

“That's probably a good idea,” Monty said. Sharon heard the edge in his voice. She knew he was upset.

As she buttoned up her blouse, put on her sweater and shoes, Monty pulled on his trousers and slipped on his own shoes. “I'll walk you back,” he said. Still with that edge.

“That's not necessary,” she said.

“No, it is,” he said, and his voice was gentler this time.

somebody approaches us, do we automatically go, “Oh, he's just being kind to me because I'm fat”? Then what does that mean in terms of what you're willing to do for him sexually? Or what you're willing to ask of him to do for you? I think more women are programmed to do for him, without that being reciprocated. You see that in oral sex, for sure. I talk to men about this a lot and it's all about blow jobs for them. When you ask them if they do oral sex on their partner, they go, “Are you fucking kidding me?” And I think, “Are you fucking kidding me? Well, we can just cross you off the list.” I make it kind of funny, but they say, “I could never do that. It's dirty down there.” It's hard when people respond like that. And after he cums, he generally responds, “Oh, that was really nice. Let's just snuggle.” In a lot of cases, it's never about, “So what can I do for you? How can I make you feel as special as you made me feel?” It's depressing. The year WOACA was founded was also the year that Viagra came out. Men living in a senior facility would make their rounds: morning, after lunch, and maybe in the evening with different women. They would convince the women that they wouldn’t get pregnant. They basically told me they were doing ‘community service.’

“Women need each other more than ever”

I don't think I've done a bad job with WOACA, that's not been it. I certainly raised a lot of shackles in terms of confronting people about their passivity around getting older. One of the things that keeps people vibrant is their ability to try new things, to reach outside their comfort zone. When I look back to my beginning days of being a young adult, we had such a big community. I was one of the first single moms in my group. There was always a community around me. I don't see that here anymore. There's so much suspect, especially amongst older people. And a lot more women around my age are in this new sandwich generation. They have older parents, kids at home, or maybe even kids that have come back home because they aren't doing well. And then, “Oh by the way, my husband just got prostate cancer.” How do you dance with all of those different things and take care of yourself? It's very complex for women. Women need each other more than ever for support, but I'm not calling the troops together anymore. That's not a place I like to come from, but I can't think of anything else that I have not tried in ten years to try to bring women together, and it's really very sad to me.

S: How do you find intimacy in your life?

J: I roll myself up in my comforter, and I just kind of move...I move my legs and my arms, I snuggle myself, so that my whole body gets touched, because that's ‘touching’ for me. I touch so many other people in the course of my massage therapy work, and the fact that I don't have somebody to do that for me outside of my massage appointments is sad sometimes. Most of the time I'm okay with it, but as I get older I can see why people don't like being old alone – which is why I want to have a dog, because they are wonderful allies. When I see people dying, you can see in their eyes, all they want to do is be held. When I'm with somebody who's dying, I'll tell the family, “Crawl in bed with that person.” In the beginning days of HIV I would tell people that a lot. “So what if they shit on you? So what if they smell? Think about how you would feel.”

Find out more about Jacki at jackigethner.com and WOACA at healthywomenover50.org

Intimacy In The Aging Body

Crystal Sasaki reflects on somatic practices and gathers with two elders to move, write, and witness intimately. What can be discovered through sensation? How can we cultivate greater presence within?

Upon my request, the elders brought personal reflections about how their cultures have influenced their relationship to intimacy and sexual identity. We began with some low-impact somatic exercises to check in with our bodies and let ourselves take up space in the studio. Then, we searched for intimacy as we practiced giving curious attention to many things. Finally, we shared our reflections and picked word phrases from our writing to move with. While I read an elder's chosen phrases aloud, they moved their body - responding with their whole selves - while another elder drew quick gesture sketches of what they were witnessing. Everyone took turns moving and drawing. I used material from this exercise to make a collage.

A reflection from one of the elders on an intimate exploration of another's hand:

"In the last year or two, I have experienced a lot of pain in my hands. Two things in life that bring me the most joy and nourishment - playing music and gardening - are among the activities that increase the pain. For our "intimacy movement" experience, I sat down in the studio with a woman who I did not know very

well at all. I had a basically good and trusting feeling with her, but we had not logged any time together to ground a connection. We arranged ourselves in comfortable seated positions and she closed her eyes, offering me her hand to touch. With gentle curiosity and a very light touch, I began to explore the contours and textures of her hands. I enjoyed the sense of touch, the opportunity to offer her silent assurance that her hand was safe in mine, and the chance to begin to connect with her without the vehicles of our eyes and ears. When we changed roles and I received her touch, at first I was apprehensive. On certain parts of my hands, touch that others might enjoy can be quite painful to me and sometimes it has been hard to communicate that to others. But she was very sensitive to my particular needs, and after I relaxed it was a great pleasure to receive her generosity and gentleness through touch. Still not knowing each other very well, I felt that a strong sense of goodwill and enhanced trust was established through this experience."

(Below) Reflective drawings from our session after a body mapping exercise



Body Mapping Exercise

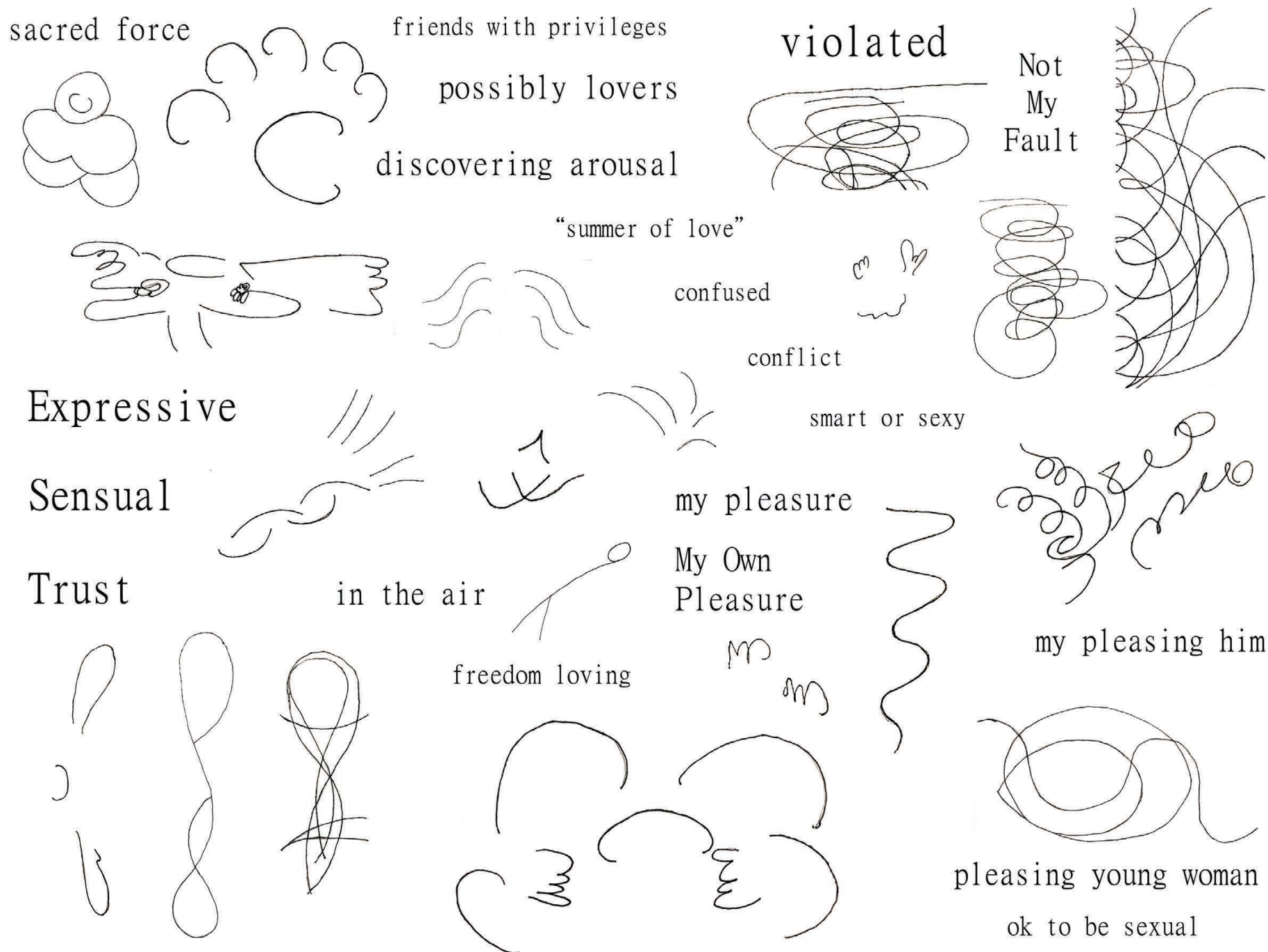
Find a comfortable position and begin to scan your body with your mind.

Bring your attention to your toes. How do they feel today? Send some love to them. Then bring attention to your feet. How does your skin feel? Where does your skin meet another surface? Begin to bring attention to your legs. What textures are happening there? Say hello to your pelvis, as if it were an architectural marvel. Continue moving your attention up the body and witnessing yourself with love. Do your arms feel like

wings? Or maybe they are mossy branches? What are your hands holding?

Let images come up as you turn your attention to feeling different areas of your body. Be with your ribs, your chest, the place where your spine meets your skull, your beautiful face, your mouth...What colors are at the crown of your head?

Take markers to paper and play with representing your experience as a body of shapes and colors.



Collage made from participating elders' words on intimacy and sexual identity, as well as gesture drawings from our session

What Is Somatics?

Somatics is a field that emphasizes one’s inner perception of the body.

Many different methods and practices fall under the Somatics umbrella. Some of the earliest are meditation and Yoga. Somatic practices can unite the physical, mental, and often spiritual selves into a sense of attentiveness and presence. Simple somatic exercises like square breathing (a continuous cycle of breathing in for four seconds, holding for four seconds, breathing out for four seconds, holding for four seconds, while drawing a mental image of the sides of a square with each breath) can immediately shift our awareness and quiet our mind's anxiety.

As a modern term, Somatics evolved through western methodologies like Feldenkrais and Alexander Technique, which are used in both physical therapy and contemporary dance communities. These therapeutic methods - as low-impact, slow-moving ways to shift structural issues in the body - have helped many people and are offered with instruction worldwide.

I was introduced to somatic practices as a dancer. **The healing I find through somatic practice is a stronger sense of presence in my body: acceptance of myself, and intimacy with the world around me.** Practicing somatics together (such as witnessing each other in movement, or moving with others through physical contact), can deeply enhance feelings of belonging.

Somatic practices continue to blend with postmodern dance. Some popular forms are Contact Improvisation and Authentic Movement. One of my favorite forms is Lisa Nelson's Tuning Scores, practiced

by all sorts of bodies at many stages of life. These methods provide playful and healthy ways to explore our bodies and express our creative selves. Theater also merges with somatics in methods like Action Theater and Social Presencing Theater. Somatic practices are studied by psychologists and used in classrooms by trauma-informed teachers and counselors.

Ancient forms such as Qi Gong, Tai Chi and Yoga have helped people connect with their bodies, find grounding, and practice holistic health for thousands of years.

Check out these resources to find a local elder-inclusive somatic practice for you!

SomaSpace (somaspace.us)
Feldenkrais, creative healing, dance classes

Annie Blair (annieblair.com)
Social Presenting Theater, Authentic Movement

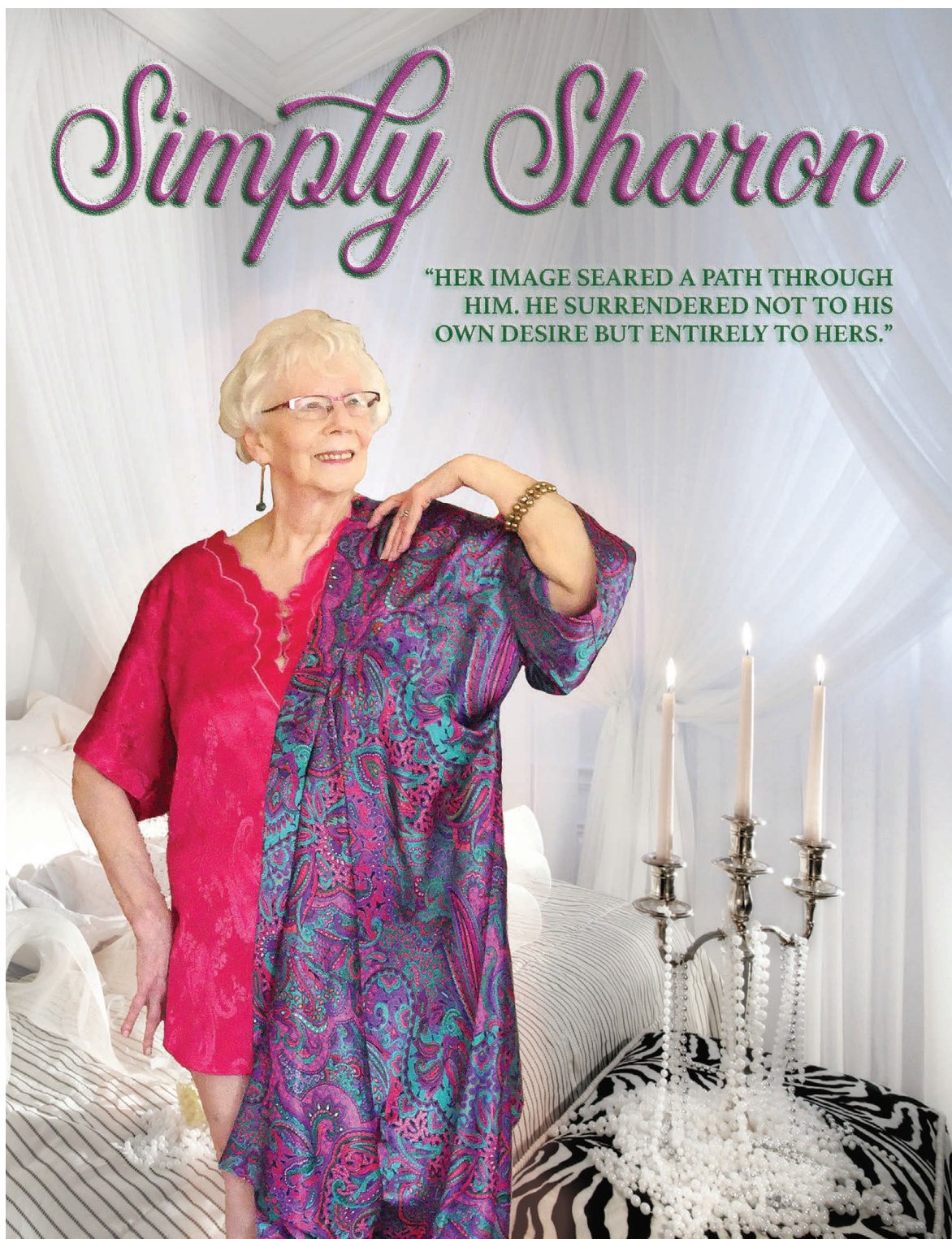
Moving Within (movingwithinmary.com)
Body-Mind Centering, Authentic Movement

Process Work Institute (processwork.edu)
Dream work, drama therapy, workshops

Wild Goose Qi Gong (wildgooseqigongpdx.com)
Qi Gong

I also compassionately offer donation-based sessions that are tailored to specific needs. Get in touch at crystal.sasaki@gmail.com

Intimate Fashion Line



Fantasies of Mildred Winters, Sharon Cooper, and Tammy B styled and manifested by Salty Xi Jie Ng and Valerie Wrede

Project Assistant: Leslie Ortiz-Angeles

SIMPLY SHARON

Who are you? At 84 years old (and proud of it), I feel 24 and want to dress or undress to please myself. When I look in the mirror, must I see all 84 years? No I don't and I won't. I see a woman who loves life and is pleased to dress to suit her mood. In this image I am the cover of my own romance novel. Reading romace novels is a hobby I enjoy immensely. **What makes you feel intimate or sexy?** I look pretty damn good for my age so go away flannel nightgown and hello pretty nightie. —Sharon Cooper

Read about Sharon's romance novel hobby on page 19

ROMANCE BY THE SEA

Who are you? When I gaze at the moon, my thoughts turn to romance and I am filled with peace and serenity. A full moon has always fascinated me. Symbolizing love and beauty, its golden glow on land and sea turns the world into a magical place. I'm drawn to the color red, and the red roses on my negligee-type outfit feel romantic. **What makes you feel intimate or sexy?** Wearing intimate and fashionable clothing and holding a glass of wine with a loving companion beside me would be one of my life's happiest experiences. —Tammy B

Read Tammy's article on romance on page 23



The way we choose to clothe ourselves is an intimate, everyday choice.

In a world that privileges younger, slimmer bodies, we asked older women to consider what intimate fashion means to them. Can they be their own trendsetters, looking and feeling good in their bodies, on their own terms? Each woman picked, altered, or created a personal outfit and dreamt up a fantasy scene that we digitally manifested. In this way, we collaboratively created not just individual looks, but worlds that reflect inner desires of aesthetic, function, and emotion. By situating these bodies in their chosen, idealized environs, we are calling for the positive benefits of fantasy and dress in self-identification.

—Valerie and Salty



QUEEN OF SOUTHERN HERITAGE

Who are you? Cleopatra is sometimes portrayed with white skin. I want to portray Cleopatra the way I know she looked. She was a beautiful African woman. This Afro-centric picture takes me back to my heritage. I am from the South. The Magnolia is the Mississippi state flower. It's the most beautiful tree in the world. My mum used to make peach cobbler. I think of the sweet smell of ripe peaches as they are baking, bubbling in the oven. The beautiful jungle atmosphere relates to where my people are from. It's a space I've thought about often. Yellow is my favorite color. I feel relaxed in it, so I made the dress in yellow and green. Even though the picture might look busy, there is a sense of peace and

intimacy from being surrounded with the things I love, that portray my inner self. As I lay down for the portrait, looking at the sky, I had a spiritual feeling, and started thinking about things that make me feel real good, like my children and my friends. I felt a peaceful relationship with Jehovah.

What makes you feel intimate or sexy? When I'm dressed and groomed. When I put on my high heels, I feel like I'm stepping tall. No one has to tell me that I look good. I just feel sexy and confident.

—Mildred Winters

My Mission At Age 79 Was To Find Another Woman

Salty Xi Jie Ng chats with Pamela Sky Jeanne and Betty Canham, lesbian-identifying elders living in Oregon, about intimacy, mothers, coming out, and women supporting each other.

SALTY: Thank you so much for being here. Would you both like to introduce yourselves?

PAMELA: My name is Pamela Sky Jeanne. I grew up in the New York area and my mother died when I was a baby. I didn't live with my father in New Jersey until I was five. As a child I was violated by him. I have a pretty painful past which I've been working on to this day. Later on I was a nurse living in Florida and moved out to Portland all by myself to go to school. I had a second career as a naturopathic physician after 40. I came out as bisexual first and then became lesbian when I was about 35 and had had enough with men. I've been very happy since then. My family's been very accepting of my status. I've raised open-minded children who are great fathers. I'm not in a partnership right now. We divorced almost five years ago. We were married 12 years. I've been happily single since then. Last January I was diagnosed with blood cancer, which really sucks, but I'm managing it quite well doing it my way. I'm choosing not to do chemotherapy and I'm managing it with a lot of alternative stuff including CBD.

BETTY: I am the most ordinary person alive. My life kind of turned upside down when I was 79. A year or two after my husband of 54 years died, I said to myself, "It's my turn." I was tired of the drama of pretending to be a straight person. I hate lying about anything, so living a lie was almost physically painful. When he was ill I took care of him and then he passed away. I loved him. Love takes many forms but it was not a sensual love. It was like a good brother I guess. My kids were out of the home mostly, so for the first time in my life I could do what I want. I thought, "Well, how do I go about this?" First of all I need to get over the fear of saying, "I am lesbian. I am lesbian." I don't want to push people's faces in it, but I don't want anymore hiding from myself. I told my best friend at church and she says, "Oh yeah I have lots of friends down at the bank who are lesbian." The reaction was, "So what else is new?" Another friend says, "I'll take you down to the Q Center." It was an 'Over Seventies' discussion group. We were all identifying ourselves and I thought, "This is it Betty, you've got to say this." So I said, "Well I guess I'm kind of a slow learner but I just came out last week." From that point on, I signed up for every lesbian event I could find. I became totally involved and my mission at age 79 was to find another woman. It was pure and simple. I wanted a partner so bad I could taste it. I had a glorious two years of just partying. In terms of finding someone, you don't have a real big pool of 80 year old women, they have to be mostly widows. A very central part of my personality is my church and so I made the pool that was available even smaller. I almost thought I had to forget about it all. Then I found

out about Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). It's mostly just gay people that go there. A friend called me one day and said, "You have got to come down here next Sunday or we're going to have words. I've just met the woman who's going to change your life." She was so convinced of it. With a promo like that, who could resist? I had to go and meet this woman. So I went there, met Mary in the back of the sanctuary and got back to my seat. My friend said, "Well, what do you think?" And I said, "That's the one." I couldn't believe it, to make that connection at my age. About a year after that we got married in a City Park in Gresham. That was the happiest day of my life.

P: I'm so happy for you. You give me hope.

B: You don't have anything to worry about. What I'm also happy about is that I can show the whole subset of Christians or gay people, who wonder if they can be gay and Christian, that nobody's killed me yet. It's okay. I still go to church every Sunday.



P: God has not struck you dead.

B: No, there's no thunder and no lightning. I'm a Lutheran. My Mary was a Catholic.

P: My Mary.

B: She's my Mary.

P: Your Mary.

B: Nobody else's, she's mine. She's the goofiest woman in the world. Mary has Mary eyes. Her face is a laughing face. I love jokes.

S: What does intimacy mean to both of you?

P: It says, 'In to me, see.' It says that someone else sees me, gets me, accepts me. I don't think sex is very important at all. The spiritual connection I have with my women friends is the most intimate thing to me. In 1990, I just was graduating from the Naturopathic school and missing spirituality. I couldn't relate to Catholicism anymore and as I became a feminist I really saw the patriarchy. I started a spiritual circle with women friends and we have grown intimacy since. We are still meeting now, almost 30 years later.

S: Do do you think there's a way that women support each other that's essential?

P: Women have been supporting each other in circle throughout the millennia – sewing circles, coffee circles, whatever circles. When women come together they are supportive when they're not influenced by the patriarchy.

B: I love the book The Red Tent. It's about women coming together when they menstruate. They develop so much closeness and intimacy. We're defined by things in our biology that we have no control over. We're defined as unclean because we menstruate. It was not my idea to menstruate. I thought it was a terrible thing to do. A lot of the reason that



I didn't come out until later was because I thought of the impact it would have on my kids. We're in a very conservative Lutheran family.

S: What would you both say to younger women who have not come out and are struggling with that?

P: First, find your own inner strength as a person because it is in there, even if it may have been stomped on or taken away from you by some unthoughtful people. Gay or straight doesn't matter. I fell in love with my French high school teacher when I was 14. She was beautiful. I didn't have any way to see that was possible, but today it is. There's so many examples of how to be out and be yourself.

B: You have to learn to listen to your own feelings in a quiet and still environment. My first experience with realising these feelings was in junior high. I was with a bunch of friends talking about the movies. They were talking about guys like Robert Taylor and Gary Cooper and I thought, "What about Barbara Stanwyck?" I fortunately did not, for my survival, say that out loud but I thought, "No, it's the women." I saw every Barbara Stanwyck movie that I could-

P: That's a clue.

B: I knew then. As I grew older I could see no evidence that women lived together or got married. I thought, "It's not possible. It's not going to work for me." I wasn't really brainy, didn't want to be a nurse or teacher, so I decided to get married. A man must support me. Along came my husband. He was nice looking, funny, employed. And nuts about me, for whatever reason, that's his problem. We got married, had a couple of kids and I thought, "I feel like I've lived my life and it's over and it wasn't much fun." I actually had an affair with a woman at one point and my husband found out. It felt like I had betrayed the promises that I had made to him. Before we got married, I said, "I think I'm gay." And he says, "Oh no, you're not." I felt I had been as honest as I could. Eventually both of us, as very logical, sensible human beings, decided not to get a divorce and to continue raising the kids. I hate it when people say, "Oh, it must've been awful living with a man..." No, it wasn't awful. It was bland. He was a good man, a good friend, extraordinarily bright. We shared intellectual intimacy – that mattered a lot. But you don't think of having romance when you're 60, 70 years old and feeling comfortable in your habitual way of living. Sex between us stopped abruptly. After the affair I said, "I just can't do this anymore." Previously, it sounds kind of crude, but I thought it was a lot like masturbation. I knew there was something else.

P: Once you've been with a woman, there's nothing like it.

B: With a man it was like decaf.

P: It's very soft being with a woman.

“I think a lot of my spirituality is probably repressed sexuality.”

B: It's about the slowness. A woman does not have that urgency to come to climax. She has the time to do what it takes. I think a lot of my spirituality is probably repressed sexuality. What is spirituality? It's that bubbling up inside of you, that something is greater than yourself. For me the sex act by itself, well, it's been lovely recently but it's only part of it. Intimacy for me is a sense of commitment from my partner. I very much get that from Mary.

S: Thank you for sharing all that. What are the objects you brought today?

P: This is Kwan Yin, the goddess of healing and the goddess of compassion. When I was to be in England for a year, she was given to me by one of the women in my circle to remember and stay in touch with the women. She has since traveled to far places around the necks of many women in that circle. That's intimacy. I'm very much passionate about who she is and her femininity. It's about peace, inner reflection, and inner guidance. It's been a source of comfort to wear her when I travel, particularly because I take my women with me and remember them through her. I think women are of mercy. That's how we hold the world. The second piece is this bracelet. It is almost pure silver. My father had it made for my

mother, I think it's from Arabia. I don't really know much about it. My mother died by her own hand when I was five months old. When I was getting ready to move from Florida to Oregon, I needed money to go to school so I was selling all my jewelry. This appraiser came to my house and he said, "No, you don't want to sell this." Probably because it's so personalized with my mother and father's names on it - Helen and Gene. And I'm so grateful to him. This is one of the few pieces left for me from her. I honor it and I'm really so happy to have it. I have told my youngest granddaughter that it's hers. This is the most intimate thing I could have about my mother who I didn't really know. What she did was what she did. I had many years of unraveling that - "Why did she leave me?" The latest thinking of mine is that she was manic depressive. It was the 1930s. She had a good life, was always doing something, travelling around the United States, maybe even Europe. She was very successful in her work, didn't marry till she was 32, which was late for that time period. She was said to be very lively and fun. She killed herself on a dreary January morning, in a New York apartment. She turned the gas on, after she put me in the bedroom, opened the window, dressed me in outdoor bunting clothes and sealed the door so that the gas would not go where I was, and took her life.



She did what she did and I don't have any anger about it because she was in pain and that was the way she had to deal with it. She was very intentional and took great pains to not take me. That's a form of intimacy in another way. I know that she loved me. When she killed herself in 1945 my father was in Europe fighting the war. She had a great job but during that time when a woman got pregnant, that was the end of her career. I think she was in grief about that. I've done a lot of healing work since and feel good about the space I'm in right now. Louise Hay's teachings on love have been part of my recovery.

B: One thing you said rang a little bell in my memory. I had some contact with my birth mother. I always had a feeling of not wanting to be around her. She was kind of a constant shame to my grandmother. She came out to California to visit my grandmother, who was too frail to go out and meet her at the station so I had to. I'm waiting there in the station and I didn't even think of her as my mother, more as some kind of older shameful sister. She got off the train and came to me. My first words to her were, "Why did you leave me?" I thought, this is somebody else talking. I had no inkling that I felt that way. About the object I brought – I like flamingos. Mary gets this fact: Betty likes flamingos. She has inundated me with purses, blankets that have flamingos printed all over them, a bedspread that has flamingos all over it. I think, "Enough flamingos," but she gets so excited and goes, "Guess what I found? Look!" It's just amazing how hard we tried to please each other, especially in the first year. When we were planning our wedding we asked both our pastors to do it – one from my Lutheran church and the other from MCC. They're two women. They had fun collaborating.

S: That's religious progress.

B: Just a few years ago my straight pastor could have been removed for even doing a gay wedding. I told her we were asking the other gal too and she said, "I would be honored to do it. She and I will have such fun planning this. She can teach me and I can teach her." People couldn't believe that we were brazen enough to get married in a public park. It was so much fun.



An Intimacy Manifesto

As we age, we're finding creative ways of experiencing intimacy that work for us.

Saying what needs to be said.

Huddling over a jigsaw puzzle with a friend, fitting our pieces together.

Having relationships with more deposits than withdrawals.

Pleasing ourselves.

Tuning into one another's aches and pains.

My hands gently rubbed with rosemary oil.

Having rich and honest discussions with eye-to-eye contact, listening with genuine curiosity and interest, revealing and knowing more about each other.

Wiggling through crowds at a festival with a close friend and nibbling on samples with pleasure.

Being engulfed in the fragrance of flowers while sinking my hands in dirt.

Sexual encounters, with music that is slow and respectful of women.

Someone making me naella

someone making me pecta.

Holding hands.

Hugs.

When women are able to know the joys of lovemaking, which necessitates our voices and needs being heard, even when it feels uncomfortable. There is often immense frustration and embarrassment at not being able to enjoy sex in the ways our younger bodies could. Sometimes difficult communication is essential to connecting intimately.

Reciprocity.

Nourishing someone with one of my meals, them wanting *more*...

The evening ritual of having my feet dipped in warm water, cleansed with lavender soap, dried with a soft towel, and gently massaged, touching the right spots.

Physical closeness and tenderness when cuddling in bed before going to sleep, our arms and legs intertwined.

By Jacqui, Ellen, Maureen, Roshani, Salty Xi Jie, Sharon, Susan, and Tammy

Senior Women's Erotica Club

Acknowledging the uniqueness and challenges of senior sex

What does erotica for seniors look like, and how do seniors relate to it? What can it look like? The Senior Women's Erotica Club (SWEC) was envisioned as a space to discuss what the erotic and physical intimacy mean to senior women, and to explore how senior erotica can be crafted as an affirming, tender, real-yet-fantastic experience. To excavate this hidden world, a few of us gathered for weeks at any available room in the Hollywood Senior Center. I felt a small yet distinct sense of revolution as Tai Chi, puzzle-making, and crafting went on in the main area of the senior center, unaware of our intriguing discussions.

There are different camps on senior erotica, as outlined by renowned senior sex expert Joan Price in her Huffington Post article '*Senior Erotica*': *Do We Want It, Need It?* Price edited *Ageless Erotica*, possibly the only senior erotica compilation in existence. She writes, "I wished for erotica that reflected my age, my experiences, my challenges, my sexuality living in an aging body. I wanted erotica that acknowledged the...liveliness, and the creativity of older-age sex...I don't respond to youth-focused erotica with its quick arousal and inevitable orgasms." On the other hand, senior erotica writer I.G. Frederick, says, "I don't believe we need erotica that emphasises the challenges of seniors – people read fiction to escape reality." As we read *Ageless Erotica* in the SWEC, we found that even though many stories were about seniors – mentioning a lifetime of shared memories, dim eyes, performance anxiety, and more – they mainly portrayed passionate sex acts focused on reaching orgasms, thereby presenting a narrow expression of intimacy at an older age. Interestingly, these stories were a turn-on for some in the group, while others found them meaningless and unrelatable. Hence we discovered that what is erotic is extremely personal. An emotionally-complex story ending with

the elusive possibility of a kiss might be erotic to someone, while graphic descriptions of a maiden being ravaged by her lord might be another's cup of tea.

As a group, I wanted us to put out what was missing in the senior erotica world. Perhaps more seniors would be able to relate to descriptions of caring physical touch. Being *sexual* is not always about having penetrative sex or orgasms; sexual wellbeing can be nurtured in many other ways. After only one SWEC member said she would write a piece of erotica, it became

and how endorphins released during sex can help one forget such pain. At times I wondered if mentioning sagging body parts and dentures would sensationalize senior intimacy, but decided that this piece sought to acknowledge what others hadn't. Maybe a detail would elicit a soft, knowing chuckle in someone and repulse someone else – and that would be okay. Those who cannot relate to this piece will likely find others out there that they can relate to, but we were hard-pressed to find a piece that focused on emotional intimacy while also presenting banality and sexual frustration. It turned out that a few details in my erotica were a turn-off to some women in the group, but all of them appreciated the piece's tenderness and intimacy. I would also like to note that there are many other things this piece did not get to mention, such as aging bodies with very low mobility, Alzheimer's, and gumming (sucking on a man's penis without dentures, apparently very pleasurable).

We also had fascinating discussions on masturbation, oral sex, active sex lives well into older age, and navigating the challenges of communicating one's sexual needs to a partner. It was a space of vulnerability, trust, and curious pursuit by elder women thinking deeply about the experience of aging. I am

tremendously grateful to them for their commitment and for allowing an inquisitive younger woman like myself to facilitate our experience together. Our explorations of senior erotica and intimacy do not end here; the SWEC plans to meet regularly and invite more senior women in. For now, here are different perspectives on erotica and physical intimacy in older age. We welcome your feedback as we deepen the conversation.

—Salty Xi Jie Ng, facilitator of the Senior Women's Erotica Club



clear that I, as the younger woman obsessively researching this world, should write the piece I wanted to see. Could I create something that appealed to everyone in the group? Can it contain real aches and pains, emotional complexity, maybe a hard-to-reach orgasm? If the orgasm never comes, how can 'failure' and 'performance' be transmuted through a loving paradigm centering care? I consulted with these women every step of the way. They advised me that 'blowjob,' 'boobs,' and 'strip' were overly-youthful words. I included their experiences, such as finding the right positions to accommodate physical pain,

My Special Time To Relax

By Sharon Cooper

When I had cancer surgery six years ago, I knew I would have to stay in bed for a while after. So right before the surgery, I bought an iPad and put books on it. I don't read to retain the story; I read for the pleasure of the moment. In historical romance novels, there's always a lot of derring-do, spying, and lots of romance, beautiful costumes, dukes and duchesses. I'm a real history buff. You get a lot of that James Bond type of thing.

I enjoy reading romance novels immensely. I'm out five days a week, and when I come home, that is my way of winding down. I sit on the bed with my feet up because that's a good thing for my legs. I usually have my thermos of tea by my bed and if I'm hungry I

get munchies like crunchy cheetos or chocolate. And it's just my time. It's my special time to relax.

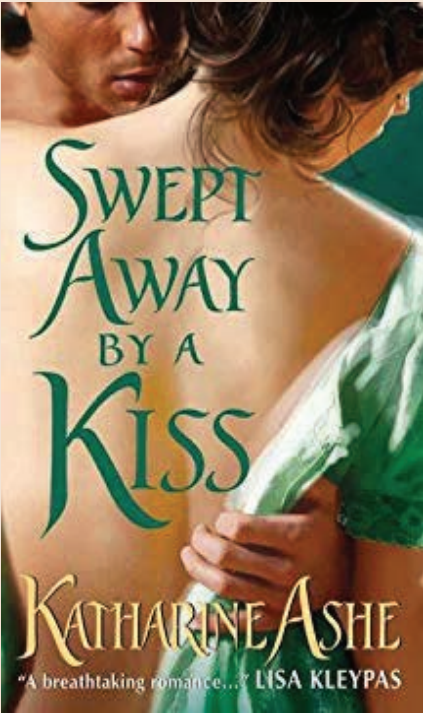
I've always enjoyed romance novels even as a teenager. But at that point they weren't as explicit as they are today. The romance in these books is more erotica than intimacy. The erotic scenes contribute to the plot development, as do the action and history scenes. It's a blending of all three that makes it so important.

Now that I have macular degeneration, I cannot read physical books anymore, because the print is too small even in the large print versions. On the iPad, I can adjust the size to what works for me. It's very easy. I set up an account in an app called Overdrive. In there, you set up a connection to Multnomah County Library, and then a branch. You hit 'search' and then you write in the title. Once you find and download it, you can borrow it or put it on your waitlist. You also have the choice to recommend it if they don't have it in the library. My waitlist probably has a minimum of 200 books on it. Six recommendations come in daily to me from the Romantic eReads newsletter. Then I can check out the writeup on each book and decide whether to borrow it.

(Left) Sharon's romance novel waitlist

Swept Away By The Kiss by Katharine Ashe (2010)

An excerpt picked by Sharon Cooper



His mouth touched hers, then pressed closer as she accepted his advance. The kiss lasted a few minutes, allowing her to feel his firm shoulders beneath her hands and take in his sandalwood fragrance before he released her.

“Valerie, are you unsure of me?”

“You know my feelings for you and I will not demand more of you at this early date. It would not be honorable of me.”

He took her hand, kissed it, and said, “I am happy to wait for your affection with hope. You will not, I trust, make that wait too difficult for me?”

Get in the Groove & Do the Dance of Love

By Jacqui Jackson

I enjoy good love-making. I had a thought today that the reason I have such a positive attitude about sex even in my old age is because I have had two very good lovers that cared just as much about my pleasure as their own. I feel lucky to have had such a positive experience that I can reflect on when I'm alone.

Because women need more time to get in the mood, sometimes sex starts hours before the bedroom. A shoulder rub, a pat on the booty as she walks by, hand holding while watching a movie, a little nibble on the earlobe. If a man acknowledges this, they will get a lot more later on. We can sync our desire with our partner's if we learn what they like.

One great way I have found to do this is to use slow music that is respectful towards women. Since we live in a fast-paced world, we can use such music to slow down and enjoy every moment unrushed while making love.

If a man has sex fast, he'll come fast. But if he slows down, he can better control his climax and have more time to please a woman to her climax. When you use a song with a slow, steady beat you can both get in the groove and do the dance of love. Try it - you will see that it can take you to a whole new experience.

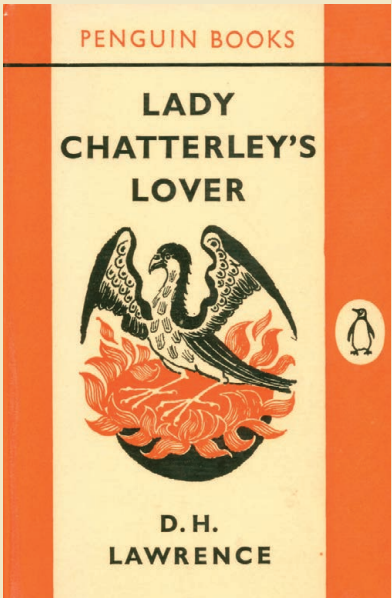
Here is a playlist shared by one of my great lovers to improve our sex life by slowing our gyrations down. My favorite is The Secret Garden by Quincy Jones. It sets the tone to share all of you with someone to experience the ultimate. I think the best lovers are the ones that are open to trying new things. With willingness, partners can talk about their needs and explore each other's bodies with much pleasure and love.

JACQUI JACKSON'S SLOW SEX PLAYLIST!

Lady Chatterley’s Lover by D.H. Lawrence (1928)

Excerpt picked by Susan Green

It was a night of sensual passion, in which she was a little startled and almost unwilling: yet pierced again with piercing thrills of sensuality, different, sharper, more terrible than the thrills of ten-



derness, but, at the moment, more desirable. Though a little frightened, she let him have his way, and the reckless, shameless sensuality shook her to her foundations, stripped her to the very last, and made a different woman of her. It was not really love. It was not voluptuousness. It was sensuality sharp and searing as fire, burning the soul to tinder.

Burning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places. It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will

of her. She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. Yet the passion licked round her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvelous death.

She had often wondered what Abélard meant, when he said that in their year of love he and Héloïse had passed through all the stages and refinements of passion. The same thing, a thousand years ago: ten thousand years ago! The same on the Greek vases, everywhere! The refinements of passion, the extravagances of sensuality! And necessary, forever necessary, to burn out false shames and smelt out the heaviest ore of the body into purity. With the fire of sheer sensuality.

In the short summer night she learnt so much. She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead of which, the shame died. Shame, which is fear: the deep organic shame, the old, old physical fear which crouches in the bodily roots of us, and can only be chased away by the sensual fire, at last it was roused up and routed by the phallic hunt of the man, and she came to the very heart of the jungle of herself. She felt, now, she had come to the real bedrock of her nature, and was essentially shameless. She was her sensual self, naked and unashamed. She felt a triumph, almost a vainglory. So! That was how it was! That was life! That was how oneself really was! There was nothing left to disguise or be ashamed of. She shared her ultimate nakedness with a man, another being.

Sex In One’s 70s & Beyond...?

By Susan Green

I remember once somebody interviewed some famous man and he said that just that idea, the memory of what sex was like, is enough. Not the desire to have it, but the memory of what it used to be. It was very important in my life when I was young. I’ve had a lot of sex in my life. I remember all those experiences, but I’m not the same person now. I’m 76.

Now I could do without it because it’s an effort, it’s work to get there, which wasn’t the case when I was younger. Part of the time I feel that my partner wants it, so I go along because I care for his needs. Eventually I get aroused because he is very attentive. And when I get there it’s satisfying, I feel close to him. Although sometimes he’ll get tired after he comes and I haven’t come yet. Because of these frustrations, the sex act has become less intimate while the cuddling is more sustaining. Due to my age, sex doesn’t have the same lure to me as being really close to my partner in other ways.

I never read erotica. I didn’t even think that there was such a category. When I was growing up, Lady Chatterley’s Lover was a famous book exploring sex. Rereading it now, I’m struck by how the woman’s point of view mattered as much as the man’s. D.H. Lawrence cared about our passionate animal nature, which to him in its purest form manifested itself sexually; he believed this human quality was being lost with industrialization taking over. It’s rare to see movies about older bodies in bed. When I do, I identify with the bodies, which has more potential to arouse me than seeing skinny, wrinkle-less, young bodies having instant orgasms. So few films portray older naked bodies because they’re not considered attractive.

When you’re of childbearing age, you have to be turned on fast for the race to continue. When women are past menopause, there’s no reason for sex biologically. Often their desires wane, which is reinforced by societal attitudes towards older women, as if their sexuality is extinct.

If I didn’t have it at all, if we just had the cuddling, I think I’d probably be fine, because I’m also very physically active in my life. By the time I get into bed at night, I’m tired. I enjoy the weight of his limbs on mine. I guess it’s a metaphor for having a witness to my life and having somebody who’s solid and there for me. It feels really comfortable, like a little oasis amidst the hard stuff.

The Ultimate Sexy Surprise

By Anonymous

It was a rainy summer’s day and she was sad. They hadn’t had a weekend together in months because they were both busy with their own activities. They used to go to New Orleans, see concerts, and have passionate sex. Today he was off running errands and she was cleaning house. She was almost done when the phone rang. It was him. His truck had broken down. She suggested calling the Automobile Association but he didn’t want to stand out in the heavy rain waiting for them. “Can you pick me up?” he asked, “I rolled into the Holiday Inn parking lot to get off the road. I’ll wait for you in the lobby.” “Okay, I’ll hurry,” she said. Holding the phone up with one hand and a dirty cleaning cloth in the other, she was in her favourite outfit: denim shorts and a red tank top. It was so hot out she didn’t bother changing into something else and left the house quickly.

All the way there she wondered if their weekend would be ruined now. She got there quickly and went inside, looking around the lobby. He was standing in a corner in his best suit, holding a bouquet of flowers. Daisies, Black Eyed Susans and Red Salvia (she was never a rose person; they died too quick). “What?” she exclaimed, a smile slowly spreading across her previously tired face. He said he had a surprise for her and it all started upstairs in a suite. He took her hand and led

her to the elevator. They pressed ‘four.’ The door closed. He pushed her against the wall and they kissed fervently. She could feel herself quickly getting aroused. When he opened the door to the room she was surprised at how stylish it was. It had a bedroom and a living room. Instead of the usual pastels, it was painted in bright colors. Best of all, it had a round king-size bed. He had taken care to choose something special for them.

Her suitcase was in the bedroom. He had thought of everything. Opening a bottle of wine, he told her about his plan for their special weekend – lots of wine, love-making, driving to the beach, walking in the sand, swimming in the ocean. “Do you like those ideas?” he asked. “It sounds great but now all I can think about is making love,” she said. He laughed gently, took her into his arms and kissed her. Now she was really excited. They started to undress each other. He slowly eased off her red tank top and unbuttoned her denim shorts. When she took off his shirt she could see that he had oiled his body to accent his musculature because he knew it turned her on. His skin was much older and quite wrinkly, but still very muscular. She liked that he took such good care of his body. Not as slim as she once was, she felt a little self-conscious but he said, “I love your curves.”

On the desk was the tape he brought. It was her favorite love-making song, The Secret Garden by Quincy Jones. He pressed play on the deck. Now as they kissed ardently all the apprehensions went away and they began to make love.

Things were different now because they were older and it took more time to make each other satisfied. They always worked at it because they both knew the climax was worth it and they cared about each other’s pleasure.

As their bodies moved to the beat of the music she felt so much pleasure. He licked and nibbled every inch of her body and she moaned. She slid from under him and straddled him. She knew his bad knee would make it difficult for him to continue on top.

Now lying atop she could lick his body. He whimpered a bit and moaned, “I want you.” She grabbed his big, hard penis and slid it inside of her. Now they were one, moving together slowly to the music, enjoying every minute.

They wanted it to last as long as possible so they slowed down even more, holding back as long as they could.

Soon it was impossible to wait a second more and as she exploded he quickened the pace and ejaculated inside her. They melted into each other’s arms and lay quietly, breathing slowly.

The room was warm and smelled of sex. She started to think of all the wonderful plans he had made for the weekend.

This was just the beginning.

There’s something just as inevitable as death, and that’s life

By Salty Xi Jie Ng in consultation with the Senior Women’s Erotica Club

“Rhinoceros or rabbit?” she asks. The toy shelf of the Hollywood Senior Center thrift store is filled with stuffed animals made from stiff acrylic yarn. One of them will make a perfect gift for their six-year-old granddaughter.

“I don’t know, I just want to get my cinnamon bun, go home, and rewatch that Chaplin film with you,” he replies. His favorite bakery is about to close. She is going to be 75 in July. He is going to be 80 in September.

She walks over to another shelf, and picks up a red wool beret, limp and blazing amidst soft chiffon scarves. It has a thin paper tag pinned on it that reads, ‘Hollywood Golden Treasures. Handmade by a Senior Citizen.’

He smiles and walks over.

“Looks just like it.”

They both stare while she caresses it.

“Okay,” he breaks the silence, “She’ll like the rhinoceros. Quick, I’m hungry.”

Fifty years ago she was a struggling writer working as a mailwoman and he was a math teacher living in the last house on her daily mail route. She wore a red wool beret from fall through early spring. It perched above the curly black hair on her petite frame. He would spot her from his window and greet her at the door. They fell in love quickly. Algebraic equations flew through her poems, which she fervently penned late at night. He would send himself mail cheekily addressed to the both of them. Eventually they got married and she moved in.

At first, they were always desirous. Hastily stripping the other, they took delight at each piece of clothing falling off until they were two thin, naked fish flapping in bed. He stayed hard long, was passionate and tender. She was playful and adventurous, wanted it

in the bathtub, in the middle of the night, straddling him in different positions. It was frustrating to slow down and work hard on her orgasms, but they tempered the speed of youth with patience and care. She would come eventually to a swell of loving emotion. And then they would hold each other in bed, silently at first, then chatting about what to eat, for they were always ravenous after.

A boy came to them. She was done delivering mail. Then a baby girl. He changed schools and they moved house. Another girl. She cooked non-stop, baked the occasional pound cake, cared for them all day, and tried to write at night. She and he argued all the time, almost didn’t make it. The kids got older, got busier, got more difficult. The boy broke his leg but they all went to the desert in New Mexico anyway (it had taken a while to save up for a family vacation). She and he disagreed over who should drive and how much money to spend. He got her a limestone from a gift shop on their last day. She accepted it with a wan smile, then turned to see where the kids had run off to.

That night they had sex in their economy motel room. They were exhausted, and hearing their teenage children talking loudly next door reminded them of lives no longer quite their own. But they both needed sex and felt a certain pressure to commemorate the last night of their rare holiday. Slowly taking off each other's clothes, a mixture of love and resentment hung in the air. He cupped her breasts and squeezed them, sucked her nipples. She looked wanting, but sad. She rubbed his penis. He was very erect, but she took a while longer. He fingered her as they lay looking at each other, unexpressed feelings welling between them. The kids kept shouting next door. When she was wet enough he got on top and inserted himself less gently than he had intended. She tried not to gasp loudly. They were upset with each other, she more than him, and this made their sex rough and fast. He had to muffle her with each angry push that was welcomed with a grinding of her hips. He came too soon. When he started kissing her navel and moving downwards, she gently guided his head away, and said it was okay if they ended there. She was already tired. She gave him a peck on the cheek and made him hold her hand while they fell asleep to the kids' laughter.

The kids went away to college near and far. The house felt a little hollow. They cuddled or held hands in bed most nights. She got a job at the zoo and kept writing poetry.

These days they volunteer at the senior center, take long hikes, care for their grand-kids, are active members of a bird watching club. She has chronic lower back pain and arthritis. He had a stroke two years ago, got a knee replacement, moves slowly. Four years ago, on her 70th birthday, she wrote a poem. He read it and nodded, not saying much. The last stanza read:

*already arthritic, strangely iridescent
from shriveled womb to fragile elbow
faithfully downing pills for osteoporosis*

Today is their 49th wedding anniversary. Both forgot, which has happened only three times. Today they remember a red wool beret.

~

In *Limelight* Chaplin plays an older, failing vaudeville clown named Calvero who mesmerizes Terry, a young, beautiful dancer he nurses to health after her suicide attempt. She wants to marry him. He thinks she should be with a young, handsome composer. She convinces him to make a stage comeback. It works. But later, watching her dance gloriously on stage, he dies in the wings from a heart attack.

Terry: What is there to fight for?

Calvero: Ah, you see, you admit it. What is there to fight for? Everything. Life itself, isn't that enough, to be lived, suffered, enjoyed. What is there to fight for? Life is a beautiful, magnificent thing, even to a jellyfish. Besides, you have your art, your dancing.

Terry: I can't dance without legs.

Calvero: I know a man without arms who can play a scherzo on a violin and does it all with his toes. The trouble is you won't fight. You've given in, continually dwelling on sickness and death. But there's something just as inevitable as death, and that's life. Life, life, life. Think of all the power that's in the universe, moving the earth, growing the trees. That's the same power within you if you only have courage and the will to use it.

"My mum watched this once and cried." The credits roll, illuminating their faces in the dark.

"Mmm," she responds, turning away slightly to hide her glistening eyes. They each sit in their favorite armchairs on either side of the television.

"If you were Terry and I were Calvero, you would've convinced me to marry you," he says playfully.

Her back turned, she smiles. "Want me to prepare your hot flask for the night?" she asks.

He yawns.

~

He is already in bed, awash in the soft glow of their bedside lamp. She peels open the blanket and slides in slowly, her arthritis acting up on a cold night. Both on their backs, breathing in the dark.

"Hey?"

She reaches a hand over and finds his. The hand she's held for fifty years. Once sturdy, it is now knobby and frail. Still comforting. She's tired from the day and emotional from the film. Maybe Terry did not deserve Calvero. Maybe she did not deserve to shine her beautiful, blooming body like a martyr of youth upon his aged, flabby one. Conversely, she did not deserve to be inundated with his fabulous, almost frivolous litanies on life. Who was Calvero's true audience then?

With a grunt he turns his big body over, a signal for her to roll on her side. He hugs her from behind and in this position they warm each other up. This is how it has been on countless nights. Over the years his belly got bigger, now like a little third person between them. Tonight, as always, she is lying on her left, the good side, without the chronic pain. He plants a small kiss on her back, then slides his hand to her belly and below. Perhaps it was the anniversary unbeknownst to them that aroused this seed of desire.

They lie there for a few minutes, breaths getting heavier as he stroked her crotch. This is how it usually begins if initiated by him. She used to feel him becoming a little hard between her legs, but with his belly now she cannot tell.

"Should I take Viagra?"

Even though she was tired, she cared for his needs. After all, she would be aroused soon enough.

"Alright."

He reaches for the bedside drawer and finds it. Then he removes his dentures and places them in a glass of water beside the bed with a clink.

"My back isn't doing so well tonight, just so you know," she says matter-of-factly, gently, a reminder for him as much as for herself. He nods.

They each undress themselves slowly. There is no hurry; the Viagra will take a while to kick in. Her breasts sag, hovering over her waist. The sight of them is comforting, the breasts he's known forever, that nursed their children. He is over young bodies with perky breasts, doesn't know what he would do with them. They are a lifetime away. How their bodies have changed, now blessed with a sheath of wrinkles like criss-crossing constellations.

Five years ago her lush pubic hair started turning silver and falling out. Now a small patch remains, barely covering her loose vagina. She is no longer bothered by how she looks down there. She reaches her knobby, arthritis-ravaged hands out, and runs them up and down his thick arms. Soft and wrinkly.

"They're sore from all that gardening today," he says.

"We did a good job getting all the seeds sown on time," she replies.

He leans over and kisses her nipples. They find the right position to accommodate his bad knee, her bad back. Parting her white pubic hair, he gently sucks on her below. She melts predictably into arousal, the endorphins making her forget arthritic pain.

Already riding a wave of tiredness, they lie facing each other, looking into the eyes they know so well. They are both less responsive than before, and take time to tease each other's genitals with slightly shaky hands. They have done this a thousand times. Even as they flush with pleasure, their minds wander. Tonight she thinks about her granddaughter's birthday party tomorrow, whilst he worries for his best friend in the hospital with lung cancer. But these thoughts dissipate as they start moaning gently. As the Viagra takes effect he soon becomes turgid enough to enter her. The sight of him hard for her ignites a small fire in her lower belly. Even though she is aroused, she is too dry.

With generous amounts of lube and a massage between her thighs, she finally gets wet enough to insert him while she sits on top. They rock slowly and let out small sounds of pleasure, interlacing fingers. After a while as the wetness wears off it starts to

feel abrasive, and then without warning he becomes soft and slips out of her.

“It doesn’t always stay hard,” he says, although they’ve been through this a lot recently.

It is always frustrating, but today the tenderness of age softens bleak familiarity. They find comfortable positions lying down on their good sides and he sucks on her for a long time, in the ways she likes. He was always good at this. She feels lucky; she’d heard from the few friends who confided their sex lives that their partners didn’t enjoy doing it. Deliriously aroused now, she moans for more, and he patiently works hard at it till she comes, splayed on the bed. His knee hurts a little, but he doesn’t say anything. They rest a while, holding hands.

“Do you want to try again?” she asks.

“Yes.”

Licking and sucking on his wrinkly penis, she teases it while rubbing its flaccid stem. After so many years with his body, she knows what to do. Sometimes she gets bored, but even when it takes a while he eventually gets erect again. To try and finish off, they get into their favorite position. She stands at the side of the bed with her bum facing out, resting her torso on stacked pillows. He gets behind her, supports himself with a nearby chair, and enters from behind. The very thought of ‘fucking like rabbits’ used to turn her on endlessly, secretly: partly from the use of that word, partly because it spoke to an animalistic passion in her. Now there are a lot of maneuvers and interruptions to readjust. It is all part of how it has to be now. As he pushes into her she writhes in pleasure even though the penetration isn’t as deep, because their bodies are in the way.

His erection doesn’t hold for long, and again he slips out limply. They are both a little disheartened, mostly tired.

“It’s okay,” she says, turning around and holding his hand.

He looks her in the eyes.

“Yeah, it’s okay,” he says.

After cleaning up, they put their flannel pajamas back on and crawl into bed. Cuddling with arms and legs intertwined, they are not yet asleep, listening to each other breathe, ensconced in the warmth of their bodies.

Hopeless Romantic

By Tammy B

I am looking for a storybook romance. I would have loved to marry Prince Harry. How Harry and Meghan came together was an ideal fairytale for me. Romance means showing love and care for each other. It would be nice to regularly have evenings out, have long and good conversations, hold hands. I call myself a hopeless romantic. Here’s how it goes. If I’m sort of attracted to a guy I know, if he says something nice to me, not out of being attracted, I start falling for him. The reason I call myself hopeless is because I tend to read these signals wrongly. I read a lot of romance novels as a teenager, but I think the feeling comes from me. I am very loving. In general, one of my inspirations in life is The Beatles song All You Need Is Love. One guy was very naive. I texted him one night, “I Wanna Hold Your Hand,” like The Beatles song. He was so unromantic, he replied, “I Wanna Sleep.”

I had 26 penpals when I was in high school. Some of them were guys writing romantic letters. There was one guy who wrote me from Africa. He wrote me poetry all the time. I was always a romantic person. I had a lot of boyfriends when I was younger, and eventually got married at 23. A marriage of 35 years started losing its charm, and became platonic although he always cared for me. I’ve heard it’s normal for one’s partner to change. I’m a patient person who wants to work things out but I felt unless both parties participated, it wasn’t going to happen. Unfortunately or fortunately, I still had interest in romance. I wanted more. My ultimate goal is to find a long-term male companion who can really share my interests and to care for each other’s needs.

It’s difficult to find romance at my age. I’m limited because I’m not in the computer world. Not doing it online, I haven’t had much luck. The places I go to don’t seem to have the people I’m looking for. It’s difficult to find men in my age group with my interests. I want to go out singing, dancing, and listening to music. Musicians always interest me. Younger men may not be as mature, but our interests more likely match. I miss good conversation. The older men I’ve met are not talking as much or having as much fun. All of my female friends are not interested in romance or nightlife. That makes me feel I’m deprived of something and missing out. I can stay out till 2am to sing karaoke. I’m kind of unusual. I don’t fit into my category. One friend asked me jokingly, “Why don’t you act your age?” I thought, “What do you mean, play cards all day long?”

WOULD OLDER WOMEN PAY FOR COMPANIONSHIP AND SEX SERVICES? - *THE INTIMACY TABOO*

Salty Xi Jie Ng reflects on conversations with Jacqui Jackson, Susan Green & Tammy B

A few women on The Grandma Reporter team started wondering whether there is a market for companionship and sex services targeted at older women. It seems natural to think of men as sex work clients, so why don't we hear of such services for everyone else? In The Netherlands, where prostitution is legal, government subsidies for differently-abled citizens can be used to access sex services. In England, a disabled man campaigned for a similar scheme to public outrage. In Germany, there is a niche in the sex work industry where women sex workers have older male clients who sometimes reside in senior living homes. These women consider themselves 'sexual assistants,' talk about cuddling and the importance of touch, as well as identify a greater sense of meaning in their work than if they were serving a younger crowd. While many are opposed to some of these movements, it is undeniable that sexual health and intimacy are increasingly seen as important to overall wellbeing.

When a small group of us met to discuss this, we listed the range of services that might be desired by older women – from companionship (going for a meal, holding hands, singing, dancing) to cuddling and sex. A quick search online showed that there are no such services for older people that are easily found virtually, and certainly none that framed them as being important to physical, mental, and emotional health. We did find Cuddle Up To Me, a cuddling service in NE Portland that the women in our group were not interested in, partly because none of the Certified Cuddlers appeared to them as men. A woman in our group said she was tired of not being able to find a long-term companion and might be open to paying for companionship, then seeing where that led physically. Another declared, "Intimacy is not transactional."

It was quickly decided that the idea of governments providing such services here would be hard for most people to accept. Perhaps a small business could do it? It could be safer than online dating,

since escorts and sex workers would be hired under an organisation, thus eliminating virtual scammers who target older women. However, the relationship would probably not be long-term or real in the ways these women seem to ultimately desire.

Would these service providers have to train in senior care, such as learn how to handle wheelchairs?

Who would pay for such services? By the end of the session, our inquiry had shifted to whether there was even a demand.

We brazenly created a delicately-worded survey to be administered at the Hollywood Senior Center, despite earlier reactions of astoundment or aversion when women invited their friends to join The Grandma Reporter's intimacy issue project. The survey asked heterosexual elder women about their desire for male companionship, whether that relationship should have a physical dimension, and whether they would pay for intimacy services. The reason for taking a heterosexual lens with this inquiry was because we had only heterosexual people in this inquiry group, and felt that a queer-focused inquiry would be a differently-crafted and differently-led one.

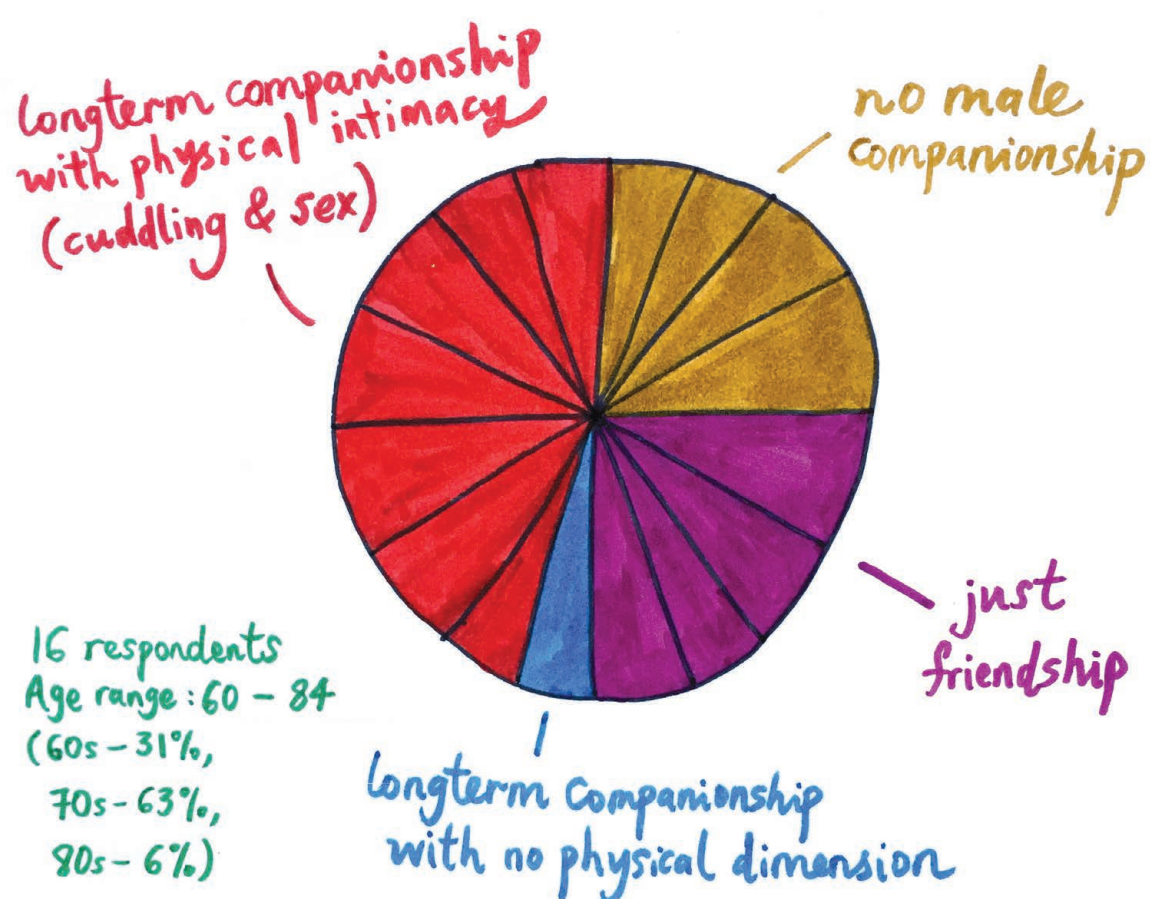
At least forty women declined to take part in the survey, citing disinterest. Some of them seemed upset by the survey. The taboo rang clear. Not surprisingly then, the 16 who responded mostly said they would like more male companionship. Seven out of eight who wanted a long-term male companion wanted the relationship to have a physical dimension, and all seven wanted that to be sexual. Just one person said she would pay for companionship although she prefers an intimate non-paying relationship. Another hinted at being interested in such services, commenting, "It depends on the person – I do have some physical limitations. This is harder for me but not out of the question. I would require a lot of patience and understanding so, not just with anybody, it would have to

be someone really special. I barely have enough \$\$ for my medical care and the few things I like to do for fun." There is some potential in governments providing such services by well-trained professionals, but if our results were anything to go by (despite our un-robust sample size), there would be little demand. Location matters, and if the survey had been administered at The Villages in Florida, a senior retirement village with a reputation for fun, the results might have been different. But we did it at the Hollywood Senior Center because it was our community. Therefore, we can only say that such a service would be met with little or no clients at the Hollywood Senior Center.

As we analyzed the results, disappointment and frustration at the lack of participation were expressed. Why are intimacy and sex such taboo topics, even across generations? Theories about why women reacted like that flew as we huddled in the senior center's back room: those who don't want to talk about it have never known fulfilling sex; people are afraid to talk about their feelings; women aren't used to asserting themselves sexually.

Why is there a separation between the sex act and the ideals we have around it? What is the barrier to communicating intimacy needs, even something as simple as touch? And does our desire for intimacy naturally reside in the private sanctuary of ourselves – small, quiet and vulnerable?

Perhaps it does. But maybe the more we voice our needs, whatever they may be and however complex they are, the more likely it is they will be heard and met.



Survey results

This will only take a few minutes.

1. What is your age? (optional) 68

2. Do you wish you had more male companionship in your life?

NO (If yes, answer the next question. If no, end survey.)



3. What type of male companionship are you interested in?

- ☒ Friendship (to go to a concert, a movie, have dinner with etc)
- ☐ Being long term companions

• Do you want this relationship to have a physical dimension?

if they can get it up and last long time & not
out having a cramp or chest pain

• If yes, just cuddling and/or sexual?

“If they can get it up and last a long time and not have a cramp or chest pain.”

4. Statistically, older men take more advantage of paid companionship and physical intimacy services than older women. What type of companionship would you consider paying for?

- ☒ None
- ☐ Companionship (to go to a concert, a movie, have dinner with etc)
- ☐ Physical intimacy

Please elaborate:

It is you become selective as grow
older and the old man may not want somebody laugh or
make comment if they Don't Perform right

“You become selective as you grow older and the old man may not want somebody to laugh or make comments if they don't perform.”

In Close Proximity: Women Shaping A Future

Salty Xi Jie Ng contemplates the cosmos within and around The Grandma Reporter's Intimacy Issue

“At our age, we know how to provide intimacy to ourselves,” Sharon Cooper, 84 years old, said the first time our group of women met to work on The Grandma Reporter's intimacy issue. Struck by the simultaneous sense of pragmatism and nourishment in that self-determined statement, I wondered what she meant by intimacy. A friend once told me, “You can be intimate with all things. A tree you walk past, your breath, a tablecloth.” Intimacy to me is closeness and communion with life; without it we would be lonely and disconnected. I would go so far as to say it is essential to physical, mental, emotional and social health. Yet it is rarely considered as a need that must be met in our conversations or in social services for seniors, particularly those who face more isolation as they age.

Older women today have a longer lifespan than ever before, but what are their extended lives like? I am curious about what intimacy means to them, many of whom spent their lives caring for others. This issue of The Grandma Reporter was borne out of recognizing a deep need to research and share intimacy among women. In so doing it implicitly proposes a world where senior intimacy is embraced. That world would be one less focused on youthful bodies and experiences: a more compassionate and progressive one, where progress also means moving forward into a long life. In that universe, medical providers would understand intimacy in its many rich facets. They would ask their older patients about their sexual health, and whether they recently took a slow walk and smelt the spring flowers.

To explore the intersection of intimacy, aging, and being a woman, we formed an eclectic all-women's group consisting of a handful of seniors and younger artists (including myself) who would work with the elders in various projects. Brought together by their interest in examining intimacy, the seniors ranged from romantic to realist, partnered to divorced to widowed. Each contributed a unique perspective that has shaped the representation of intimacy here. A shy first session melted into an outpouring in our second session that reflected the need for women to talk with each other about these issues. Opposing views and disagreements became productive because mutual trust helped us move

“It was an opening. It gives me hope that we can still explore intimacy. I don't feel like I can never talk about it.” —Tammy B

“These are strong women who wouldn't necessarily be my best friends, but it's interesting to see how different lives have spun out.” —Susan Green



through those conflicts, usually prompting further dialogue, even gracious appreciation. There was curiosity, need, belonging, and a real devotion to the subject.

By contrast, the taboo of talking about intimacy meant many women at the Hollywood Senior Center who were approached to participate in our project were disinterested or subtly outraged. Our group was disappointed and frustrated, sentiments perhaps borne out of care towards their peers. They theorized that maybe some of those women had experienced trauma around intimacy, or equated intimacy with sex. It was also hard to garner interest when intimacy was looked at from a medical perspective. Incidentally, as our project began, Hollywood Senior Center invited Physician Assistant Student Jessica Daniel to give a talk on women's sexual health and aging. Few women attended; those who did furiously took notes when she talked about the importance of maintaining the right pH level of the vagina, and other basic but often unspoken topics. I felt a swell of emotion in the room when she said, “You deserve to be having these conversations with your medical provider.” Her talk moved me so much I invited her to contribute an article presenting the same information so it would be more widely available.

Our group saw intimacy as love, acts of care, quiet moments with self, platonic touch, and much more. Some seniors spoke of experiencing solitude in attending events alone because their friends are less active and adventurous, or when initiating non-sexual cuddles with their longtime partners, who pulled away because they felt bad about how aging impacted

their sexual performance. The breadth by which these women identified intimacy and its potential in their lives reveals that they are very sensuous and sensual beings, that they

“This is a learning tool for women to express themselves to each other openly” —Sharon Cooper

want to live with a deeper connection to life. In the Intimacy Manifesto (a poem-declaration to the world) the juxtaposition of statements like “being engulfed in the fragrance of flowers while sinking my hands in dirt”, “our voices and needs being heard, even when it feels uncomfortable”, and “cuddling in bed before going to sleep, our arms and legs intertwined” reflect a complexity of needs and desires. Sex is only one of an infinite number of ways through which intimacy can be found.

I find this kind of collaborative art-making a profound way to live, learn, and be with others. The art here is gathering to creatively explore intimacy, then harvesting that experience in the form of this publication. Projects like that are often placed under the umbrella of art and social practice, meaning collaboratively-made art that responds to and is sited in the world, as opposed to an artist's studio or gallery. Collaborative experiences create a semi-fictional universe that presents different possibilities and births a new reality. Here we engaged with the subject in vastly different, constellational ways that connect, contradict and complement. The content in this publication is thus manifold, abundant, and reflects multiplicities in the complex world of senior women's intimacy. I consider the project's primary audience to be its participants, although the secondary audience (its readers) are also vital. In conceptualizing this project, I thought about the kinds of publications that senior women might be reading and wondered if this one could find its way into hair salons, Ob-Gyn waiting rooms, hobby clubs, and living rooms. I strove towards senior-centric design, using readable fonts and type sizes that the seniors chose by testing legibility with and without bifocals.

The Senior Women's Erotica Club may be considered a conceptual artwork – a work whose essence is in its very idea. Here, marrying ‘senior women’ and ‘erotica club’ is the conceptual artwork itself because that

very combination holds artistic value. In the world of art and social practice, the conceptual artwork (or idea) is then activated as collective experience whereby the project is manifested. A shared process organically determines the outcome. My intention behind our formalisation as a club was to change the way senior women and erotica are perceived, and to render more everyday the idea that senior women would want to meet regularly and talk about erotica. This necessarily means seeing them as sexual beings. For the group, it would also create a sense of belonging and camaraderie in exploring the topic. May our inaugural club be a spark and instigator for others: my vision is for many senior women erotica clubs to spawn throughout the world, each a specific cultural space reflecting and challenging the attitudes towards women and sex in that society.

Coming together intergenerationally means shaping the future. We can learn so much from each other: how lives have unfolded with their pleasures and struggles, how the world was, is, and will be. The seniors were surprised and sad that younger women still find it hard to convey their emotional and sexual needs to their partners; somehow they thought everything had changed with the women's rights movement, largely based in Western ideology. I wondered how this conversation would be different in another cultural milieu. Through this project I ended up spending a lot of time with women my grandma's age and talking to them about things my mother and I never spoke of, like sex and emotional wellbeing. I was breaking inherited taboos in my own life as well as those of the senior women. Assuming the roles of leader, learner, and investigator, I had become privy to a world I would someday enter. More than that, I became an ambassador of sorts for an older generation that I don't yet belong to, for my future self.

"It just doesn't often happen, talking to intelligent women of a younger perspective. It's like being with a grandchild; it gives you a lot of optimism."
—Susan Green

"My sexuality has changed, like my eyes have changed and my ears have changed"
—Sharon Cooper

"I am so changed by it. It has made me feel more complete. I'm not getting what I want because I'm not in a relationship, but I am seeing intimacy in things I hadn't before." —Jacqui Jackson

In other parts of the world, especially Asia, where I grew up, inter-generational modes of living still thrive with their complex benefits and struggles. While there is a greater sense of community care and shared responsibility, evolving definitions of independence are changing family lifestyles. I wonder how it is possible to build learning and care between generations in American society, one so far removed from intergenerational modes of living. How can we shed taboos to develop a different set of values? What will intimacy look like for future seniors? The current youths, hooked onto gadgets that both connect and isolate, will be seniors one day. I'm optimistic there will be more public service announcements sharing that receiving touch is necessary for those who are old, isolated and chronically ill, as well as open conversation around what to do when you have sexual urges at age 80. With the explosion and erasure of gender definitions, intimacy will also likely be approached from a less binary perspective than it has up to this point. Through this work I grappled with how to honor different perspectives while making art from the specificities of people's experiences. Hollywood Senior Center has provided access to these spaces by working together on this project, but there needs to be more such collaborative endeavors by, with, and for different demographics. Emotional and sexual health are tied up in systemic issues, and are often ignored in a less than holistic picture of senior services. Women of all backgrounds and experiences, especially senior women living in poverty, should have support and space for healthy dialogues and services around intimacy.

Since you find yourself reading this, please consider passing it to a close friend or group of peers, and then maybe even getting together to share thoughts. Together we can usher in a world with more conversations about intimacy. Many times, in the microcosmic universe of the Hollywood Senior Center, I emerged from impassioned, tender discussions about masturbation and the quiet joys

of gardening, to be greeted by the sight of seniors playing a game of pinochle and doing Tai Chi in safe, pleasant bubbles. The world where intimacy is discussed and the world where it is ignored look quite different. Interestingly, the men at the senior center saw what we were doing and started wanting their own group. I hope they find space and community to discuss what intimacy means to them, starting with a talk the senior center has organized for them on prostate health.

Audre Lorde said, "I believe in the erotic and I believe in it as an enlightening force within our lives as women...Women have been taught to suspect the erotic urge, the place that is uniquely female...We tend to think of the erotic as an easy, tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way. And when I say living I mean it as that force which moves us toward what will accomplish real positive change."

Perhaps intimacy and the erotic are shades of the same thing – stripped of sexual association, simply a profound desire to be in close proximity to life. I think about how all the senior women in this project answered the call because they wanted to understand something about their lives and that of their peers'. I think about Tammy, who does not yet know how to use a smartphone but is, on her own accord, going to live her dream of wearing a white wedding gown (because she did not get to do that at her wedding - no matter how cliché we think that idea is) by organizing a music video project in her own backyard, where she will walk down the aisle. Can we see intimate connection with one's deep desires as erotic, as a desire to live? As a younger woman, the experience of exploring senior sensuality and intimacy is preparing me to age with other women, and inspiring me to live with greater intention in my current state, whatever it may be. Life can take us on so many paths: in some way our most important treasures are fleeting, life-affirming moments of intimacy like everyday offerings for a beating heart.

Reference: "Audre Lorde." Black Women Writers at Work. Ed. Claudia Tate. NY: Continuum, 1983. 100-16.

Image far left: Jacqui Jackson and Roshani Thakore at the first Grandma Reporter group session. *Image left:* The Grandma Reporter Collaborators. (First row, L to R) Tammy B, Salty Xi Jie Ng, Valerie Wrede. (Second row, L to R) Maureen Phillips, Ellen Gee, Sharon Cooper, Jacqui Jackson, Susan Green, Erika Dedini, Roshani Thakore. (Not pictured) Betty Canham, Crystal Sasaki, Mildred Winters, Pamela Sky Jeanne.

"I thought of all of our future and past selves exploring, shedding and growing together."
—Roshani Thakore



Intimacy In Our Stars

Horoscopes by Renee Sills



These astrological descriptions are brief glimpses into intimacy styles for the twelve signs of the zodiac in older age. Here, intimacy is defined as any kind of relationship (including with oneself) that involves love, vulnerability, and trust.

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 19)

We have all the time in the world

Throughout your life you've learned that a necessary balance to intensity is fun. By this point you know that being silly with someone – dancing, laughing, singing and having a great time – is what makes a relationship sustainable. Romantic gestures and special attention are your forté, on both the giving and receiving sides.

TAURUS (Apr 20 - May 20)

Let's thoroughly enjoy this

You've learned something in this lifetime about patience and taking time. Your lovers and friends appreciate that you know exactly how and exactly when. You pay attention to timing, texture and sensation, so that each moment can be experienced fully. Yours is an earthly kind of love that appreciates fine details.

GEMINI (May 21 - June 20)

It's good to explore lots of options

Good banter and practiced charm are attractive. As are beauty, style, wit, and anyone with a good head on their shoulders. But, as you've become older and wiser, you've also come to appreciate what might otherwise be hidden behind the surface... like a little bit of power-play, a touch of danger, and maybe a naughty night or two.

CANCER (June 21 - July 22)

I trust our connection

Looking back at what you've learned about intimacy, you might want to redefine it as "Perfect Proximity." You've required intensity, closeness, and the feeling that there's no one else in the world but you and the one(s) you love. Now you know that you (and they) need ample time and space for freedom and exploration.

LEO (July 23 - Aug 22)

Presence is more important than potential

As a younger person, possibility, opportunity, and expansion were your love languages. But as you've ripened, you've realized that what's sexier and even more satisfying than dreaming big is learning how to connect with the ones you love, in the ways that mean the most to them.

VIRGO (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

Rules are made to be broken

You've appreciated sophistication and self-assuredness in your lovers and partners. A healthy dose of sovereignty, autonomy, and accountability have brought sustainability to your attractions. Now it's time to let loose (if you haven't already). Don't shy away if there's a good chance to play.

LIBRA (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Beauty is everywhere, in everything, in everyone

As you've aged, you've come to understand that intimacy is conceptual. Skillful articulation and smooth presentation are what open doors for deeper feelings and bonds. No one is better at creating space

or crafting experience. When your sense of beauty is delighted, attraction is amplified.

SCORPIO (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

It's possible if it can be imagined

You bring utter abandon and selfless sensuality to your intimacies. There's nowhere you won't go if someone is willing to go there with you. Something you've learned now, though, is that your sensitivity to subtlety is best applied with curiosity rather than judgement or mistrust.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

The universe can be discovered in a grain of sand

Your can-do attitude and need for independence has attracted you to plenty of explorations and adventures. The secret about you, though, is how much you also love getting cozy and staying quiet at home. You know now that for healthy and balanced intimacy, you need both!

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

I easily receive and my heart is full

Your first instincts for intimacy were practical and sensual: good food and a physical connection went a long way. Now you know that there's something else which is also important: attention and appreciation for your special uniqueness. You require connections that elevate your sense of self.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

Keep it simple

You appreciate the weird and wacky. Your curiosity and many interests are charming and have attracted you to entertaining and unique companions. As life has progressed though, you've come to feel that relationships are practical and serve specific needs. Satisfying intimacies are ones that continue to introduce you to newness while keeping you steady and accountable.

PISCES (Feb 19 - Mar 20)

Imperfection is perfection

Use this mantra with everyone - including yourself - because there's nothing quite as attractive as someone who fully accepts you as you are. As you've aged and wisened, you've come to know that feeling seen and understood is more important for you than any other displays or gestures.

Renee Sills is a multidisciplinary artist, somatic educator, and consulting astrologer. Her work is an ongoing investigation into spirituality, mindfulness, creative agency, and the adaptive processes of the human body in contemporary landscapes. She is the author of Embodied Astrology and is a full-time artist based in Portland OR. embodiedastrology.com



Make a puzzle with someone. ASAP.

—Jacqui Jackson

“Thanks to working on The Grandma Reporter’s Intimacy issue, I realize intimacy is not just about sex. It happens all around us in everyday life. Janice and Tom make puzzles everyday at the Hollywood Senior Center. I never used to think more of it. One day I walked in the center, looked at them, and realised it was an intimate moment between two friends sharing time together. After I had been telling the group of women in our project about the importance of hugs, I was on the yellow line train and saw a billboard about hugs. I couldn’t believe that others were spreading the same message.”



Made by Jacqui Jackson & Salty Xi Jie Ng. Puzzle friends: Janice Lawson & Thomas Getts.

Loss

By Sharon Cooper

Thoughts fly awake
as joys of remembered passion
flow sweet as honey
through my depths

yet are often painful

at the loss of hands caressing
and fingers seeking
my eagerness
as I blend with him.

I miss the quiet aftermath
of moments spent
in whispers, laughter
and warmth in his arms.

The highs were amazing
but the lows... leave me
stretching my arms
in this empty bed

reaching...

An Intimacy Manifesto

(See centerfold)

Roshani Thakore asked *The Grandma Reporter's* senior women to ponder their intimacy needs, wants, and desires in relation to growing older. The group examined questions, shared personal experiences, made edits together, and achieved what felt like consensus to produce a collective document advocating for how we want to have intimacy in our lives as we age.

"In my work I have been very influenced by declarations created by artists. It's a very powerful thing to state the things that you want in a public form. The influences I have been looking at most recently are Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1969 Manifesto for Maintenance Art and Carmen Papalia's Open Access. When Salty invited me to participate in the Intimacy issue of *The Grandma Reporter*, I thought it would be interesting to apply this mode - publicly stating things that you want - to the topic of intimacy with a group of smart, dynamic women who have led interesting, full lives. I have also been exploring definitions of sex, intimacy, and connection in my own life, so it was meaningful to dig deeper through this intergenerational project, navigating and creating modes of intimacy for ourselves. Together, we looked at Laderman Ukeles' and Papalia's manifestos, watched an excerpt of *All the Sex I've Ever Had* by Mammalian Diving Reflex in a slumber party setting, shared stories of connection, and discussed our needs and desires. This manifesto encompasses the collective declaration for intimacy in the lives of women who came together to make this issue of *The Grandma Reporter*." —Roshani

PERSONALS

SEEKING MORE INTIMACY

WE, THE GROUP OF WOMEN WHO CREATED THIS ISSUE OF THE GRANDMA REPORTER, ARE SEEKING RESPONSES FROM YOU. PLEASE SHARE WITH US YOUR THOUGHTS ON INTIMACY, ANY OF THE ARTICLES, OR THIS ISSUE IN GENERAL. YOUR RESPONSE WILL HELP US CARRY THE CONVERSATION FORWARD, AND INSPIRE THE NEXT ISSUE. WRITE US AT THEGRANDMAREPORTER@GMAIL.COM

THANK YOU FOR YOUR READERSHIP!

LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

ATTRACTIVE, YOUNG-AT-HEART FEMALE, 64, LOOKING FOR MALE COMPANION, 40 AND ABOVE, WHO CAN SHARE SIMILAR INTERESTS.

ARE YOU A FUN-LOVING PERSON WHO LOVES GOOD CONVERSATION?

I AM VERY ACTIVE AND ENJOY MUSIC, SINGING KARAOKE, DANCING, READING, AND GOING FOR SHOWS.

LET'S MAKE MUSIC TOGETHER.
LET'S MEET.

SEND ME A PICTURE AND TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOURSELF AT DREAMERSONIA.ROSES@GMAIL.COM



Collaborators

Betty Canham was born very high, about 11,000 ft in elevation, in the Wild West town of Cripple Creek, Colorado. Raised by her grandparents in Denver, Colorado, she taught, studied political science, directed a large child care center, and raised two children. She loves music, church, and watching the Portland Trail Blazers. Betty is now happily enjoying old age living with her lesbian partner.

Crystal Sasaki (jiko) has grown around the world but their heart is from San Francisco. They dance and create interdisciplinary art that explores the emotional body and ways of relating. *lightmolecule.com*

Ellen Gee was raised in the Rust Belt and spent most of her adult life on the left coast. She has always been involved with education, creative expression, movement, and music in a variety of forms. After decades of teaching many, many children and adults, she is now very gratefully retired and enjoys spending time with her own creative pursuits.

Erika Dedini's drawing practice is a process of cultivating connection and care. Through light-hearted imagery and poetic playfulness, she explores the sweet and heavy awkwardness of being alive. She holds a bachelor of science in art practices from Portland State University.

Jacqui Jackson started out as a very shy girl in a small New England town and blossomed into a fun-loving, talkative person. She is a retired mailwoman who also used to be competitive bodybuilder. Being an active volunteer brings her a lot of joy, as does going to concerts and movies in the park. Jacqui has two wonderful sons who treat her like a queen.

Maureen Phillips grew up in England and came to New York to work at age 23. Married to an American serviceman she'd met in England, they lived in Chesapeake Bay for four decades. She moved to Portland in 2004 and has three children and one grandson. Her grand passion is gardening, which she does ecologically. A Master Gardener in Maryland and North Carolina, Maureen considers her garden a haven and thinks being with roses in Portland is a great privilege.

Mildred Winters is a professional baker and caterer who founded Mildred's Sweet Treats on Killingsworth. She specialises in southern desserts and ethnic foods. She is also a professional seamstress who wants to bring attention to ethnic fabrics and other beautiful textiles, and plans to teach sewing classes. She is a proud mother of five and grandmother of two.

Pamela Sky Jeanne is a naturopathic doctor (ND) with over fifty years of experience in medicine. She graduated from

the National College of Natural Medicine in 1990 with honors in clinical medicine. An earlier career in critical care medicine as an RN eventually led her to discover natural medicine that really helps the body heal itself. Her interest lies in education and sharing her knowledge on how to stay optimally well on the aging journey.

Roshani Thakore collaborates with artists and non-artists to examine power, redefine identities, and envision new environments through various mediums. She is currently studying in the Portland State University Art and Social Practice MFA Program as well as in community spaces, coffee shops, alternative rooms, and on the streets of Portland, Oregon. *roshanithakore.com*

Salty Xi Jie Ng is an interdisciplinary artist from the tropical metropolis of Singapore. Her work explores possibilities in the poetic, eccentric, and infinite everyday. She has worked with seniors in myriad ways, and founded The Grandma Reporter in 2016. Salty is graduating with an MFA in art & social practice from Portland State University. *saltythunder.net*

Sharon Cooper writes under the name of Sharon Rothenfluch Cooper. She is a member of the Friends Of The Oregon Symphony, an active participant in the Well Arts Institute devoted to mental health, Words of a Woman Net Society, poet-in-residence at The Argonauts' boat and *soldiersheart.org*, member of the World Poet Society, and very much a today's woman: mother of four, grandmother of six, and great-grandmother of three. An astrological Leo, this lady thrives on reading and music. Her poetry has been published extensively both on the internet and in hard copy.

Susan Green grew up on the East Coast and has lived in Oregon since the early 70's. Writing has always been central to her life in terms of career and self-expression. She has taught creative writing, composition, and women's literature, and has written plays, poetry, and a novel. Susan founded the Hollywood Senior Center senior writing group, which has been going strong for years. She has three daughters.

Tammy B is a retired kindergarten teacher of 25 years. She is a mother of two and grandmother of one. Tammy is an avid reader and enjoys music, singing, dancing, dining out with friends, and walking.

Valerie Wrede is a multimedia artist who explores the relationship between memories, wellbeing, and personal style, often through illustration, comics, and getting dressed everyday.

